THE TORN BOOK:
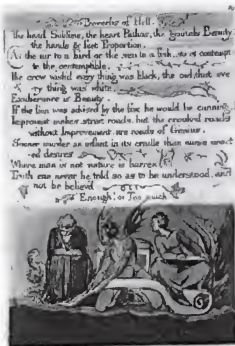FIXITY, FLUIDITY, DISORDER AND ENERGY
IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S MARGINALIA

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Enough! or Too much

Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 10 Copy F
(Bindman 116)

PREFACE

If Shelley is being entirely serious, what status do we afford the printed page? Is

it, and the marks upon it, some feeble shadow which is all we have left to represent what

was once some monument of inspiration? Is it possible that, to quote Shelley's example,

"Milton conceived the Paradise Lost as a whole before he executed it in portions" (799)?

In *The Torn Book*, I want to consider how we navigate an alternate possibility: that the

page (or by extension the book, the engraved plate, the painted canvas) is not secondary

to an original conception, it does not receive parts of an already completed whole, but is

itself integral to imaginative invention as a process. Is the act of writing merely fixing

into permanence, as best we can, what inspiration has already provided, or does the act of

writing in fact condition what one can imagine next? And by extension, does the

materiality of language then not influence meaning as we read towards it, or indeed does

materiality not guide the very reading strategies we bring to bear on any given work?

Perhaps meaning is not translated to materiality, but is a result of materiality. And might

art's materiality mean?

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To Begin: A Digression

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield complains that he could never do very well in Oral Expression, one of his prep school classes, in which students were required to deliver speeches in class while other students prepared to shout "Digression!" at any moment when the speaker did not "stick to the point." "'That digression business got on my nerves'," he tells Mr. Antolini, his old English teacher. "The trouble with me is, I *like* it when somebody digresses. It's more *interesting* and all" (183).

Since I like digressions too, and as such have engaged in one early on, it is probably appropriate to at least digress about digressions. I have often felt that my academic work has been a series of digressions: a process of continually explaining what I have just said, which itself was an explanation of what I had said before that, and so on. The work of reading and writing has never for me produced a finality, but on the contrary, has simply presented me with more that is unfinished. One begins to wonder, "at what point was I actually saying something central and not digressing?" Not to mention the nagging question: "when will I be finished?" If I had been a student in Holden's Oral Expression class, I would have be stumped to "stick to the point," in that *the point*—some originary, imaginary profundity–has long since disappeared. I can hardly deny that much of my thinking in critical and scholarly terms (and, more than likely, all other terms) has been in the form of digression. So I am not going to try and explain away digression, but rather assert it as a valid form of doing work and generating ideas. Ross Chambers, in *Loiterature* (his title suggests a kind of "literature" that "loiters"), writes of a "deliberately digressive criticism" (15) as one that seeks to create "conditions under

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which it is possible to step out of line" (Foreword). Roland Barthes, in *S/Z*, writes that

"the work of commentary . . . consists precisely in *manhandling* the text, *interrupting* it"

(15). To extend Barthes' idea of an interruptive commentary, mine has been a

methodology which remains open not just to interrupting texts, but to interrupting itself,

moving towards alternate possibilities instead of trying to exhaust one in order to move

on to another.

As Chambers does, for example, what I would like to challenge is the notion of

digression as some veering from the "correct" path: getting away from "the point." As

Chambers asserts is the case for literature which digresses, I believe critical work can also

carry "an *implied* social criticism" (9; my italics). Too often, writes Chambers, "criticism

depends, like social order itself, on . . . discriminating and hierarchizing, determining

what is central and what is peripheral" (9). My project looks in part to Blake's marginalia

for insight into "central" issues his work forces generally. My approach to the subject

matter at hand embraces digression as a mode of moving between centres and peripheries.

To digress is to challenge dogma, closure, received wisdom, with some new way

of looking at or thinking about something. This new "thing"–this process for

arriving–challenges the usual, and it must often take the form of new expression. It must

put words together in new ways. It must define words, redefine them, and redefine those

definitions, often by interrupting itself. Digression is an open process for it seeks to make

a new link; sticking to the point is to close argument at some end. Digression allows for

what Chambers calls the "permeability of contexts" (12). Sticking to *the point* too

myopically denies the possibility for self-reflexivity, for reconsideration, for interruption,

for multiple and perhaps interfering (though perhaps not mutually destructive) perspectives.

For me, writing on Blake, it is almost impossible to avoid digression. Since Blake's work itself rarely follows a strictly linear process which moves through and to a single point, any discussion of Blake must open itself up to moments of reconsideration and self-reflection. Often I find that in writing towards a particular argument, I am forced to re-evaluate not just the argument itself, but my argumentative methodology altogether. It is difficult to "prove" things about Blake's work in a traditional, rhetorical claim-and-support fashion. As many times as one can find support for a given claim, one can likely find as many instances which confound that claim. It is partly my purpose here to show the ways in which Blake's art so often functions to force these kinds of tensions, aporias, or reconsiderations: it simply demands a different kind of reading and argumentative strategy. Thus I have organized much of the present work into sections that often arrive at "conclusions" they had not entirely introduced, or digress into areas I had not foreseen from the outset. Rather than going back and always deleting my "progress" through any particular section, in order that just the conclusions remain, I have tried to retain that sense of progress and process. Again, the point is to provide a sense of how often Blake's art works to confound traditional modes of formulating argument based on observing details and developing models and rules into which those details fit: an "ultimate structure" or "great final ensemble," as Barthes might call it (S/Z 12). Nonetheless, I have structured things fairly rigorously at points and have made some general observations, and outright claims, regarding trends I see in some of Blake's work.

Ultimately however, any criticism which works towards completely systematizing an argument about Blake will serve only its own categorical, limited ends. When digression is not possible, criticism will cease to be of value. Foucault writes that "commentary . . . can never be completed" (*The Order of Things* 41). Thus I offer the warning in advance that much of the work here explores Blake in ways that sometimes need explaining and digressing, and that do not pretend to exhaust any one "topic." Nor do they always pretend to be entirely commensurate with some of the methodologies more often at work in Blake scholarship. Chambers writes, "Digression is a discursive 'slide' . . . along a line of continuity that links one context and its other [or others]" (12). So digression works in an important way: it forces my own project to remain open to new contexts, and in so doing helps me to resist making overly systematized arguments (which seems appropriate as I explore Blake's own anti-system project), even where strong currents of much Blake scholarship would suggest I do so.

If there is some originary point from which the rest of this digresses, it could be something like: Blake's poetry is anti-system and anti-systemic. However, as Blake's work itself has taught me, without exploring the particularities of that statement, and then the particularities of further statements, and then the particularities of those statements, any point remains an abstract, universalizing system itself which cannot manage critical and creative thinking and so denies the possibility for their existence. As Barthes admits, "I name, I unname, I rename" (*S/Z* 11).

Having digressed this far, however, and before I lay out the general argument at stake, I must stress that there is a linearity to my overall project, despite the often non-

linear nature of the subject matter. Donald Ault asks that readers experience his *Visionary Physics* "sequentially, from beginning to end" (xiii). The reason is that excerpted moments in his otherwise sequential argument will not make sense (or will make misleading sense) if those moments are removed from the larger context, which develops Blake's response to Newton in terms of the abstract models of their conflicting cosmologies.

The present project is undeniably linear in the sense that the focus in earlier chapters helps to explain and justify the critical gestures that I choose to make (and that I choose not to make) in later chapters. That is, the lacunae of later chapters may seem less significant (or at least less like mistakes) in light of earlier chapters.

But I digress.

Invention and Discovery

The usual argument goes that something like fire, for example, is not *invented* so much as it is *discovered*. But if there is invention in the discovery of fire, it surely comes as somebody, somewhere (or perhaps many people in many places) invents a new relationship between himself or herself and something in his or her world. So even if fire is discovered, more than we would say it is invented, certainly there exists some element of invention in the process: the invention of a relationship.

In the scientific revolution of the 17th century, we get some sense of a community of thinkers trying to come to grips with the otherwise disorderly universe in which they lived. Robert Markley, echoing Frank Manuel, writes of Newton's "compulsion to establish order in his undertakings" (*Fallen Languages* 131). Newtonian mechanics

looked to find order, some predictable relation between cause and effect, which could explain the micro- and macrocosmic phenomenal worlds. This was to be a system which described the order believed to inhere in observed phenomena, and which could thus predict those same phenomena into futurity since it revealed some fundamental level of relationships. Concomitantly, language needed to be trusted as a medium to express discovery, but one that did not alter or condition it in any way. (Foucault traces this myth of language to language's "original form, when it was given to men by God himself . . . language was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things" (*The Order of Things* 36).)

Mine is not an archaeological project to discover something hidden, something which exists in entirety a priori of my finding it. For this project is as much invention as discovery. In fact, "the point" of certain kinds of critical work is, I think, to undermine the notion of a complete argument that can be expressed entirely independently of the act of its being made; independent, that is, from the process of its being put into words. (This is perhaps also commentary's *implied* social critique, and its alternate possibility–that textuality makes meaning, it does not just provide access to it–is in fact what I have learned from Blake's work itself.) Richard Howard, introducing Barthes, writes that "all telling modifies what is being said" such that "the message is a parameter of its performance" (*S/Z* xi).

For me, the additional important thing that the distinction between discovery and invention does is to foreground what Tilotamma Rajan called the "supplement of reading": the necessary addition that is our reading of any text, space, event, or history,

and thus by extension the role of materiality, of the graphicality of words on the page, for example, in making meaning (Rajan *Supplement of Reading*).

If we assume that things in texts are there, a priori complete, to be discovered, then the supplement of reading is not that important, for there is nothing to differentiate one reader from another; reading does not really add anything to the text, since the text does not need to be supplemented. Reading to "discover" presumes to reveal that which already exists, whole and unified. Italo Calvino, glossing Roland Barthes, reminds that for literature in particular, "language is never *transparent*, and is never merely an instrument to convey a 'meaning' or a 'fact' or a 'thought' or a 'truth'" (*The Uses of Literature* 29). Barthes himself writes that "objectivity . . . [is] an imaginary system like the rest" (*S/Z* 10). I return to the issue of transparency in Chapter 2; Blake seems particularly insightful in his criticism of Newtonian science by identifying in it the impulse to deny the role of language in conditioning discovery, not just expressing it.

It is important here to admit the present work to that category of writing, be it "literature" or not, that treats reading as a process partly of invention; thus its language is implicated in what it purports to find. Otherwise, the category of "writer" or "reader" becomes more nominal than any consideration of the diversity of each and every reader, or of the process of reading. No less, if reading only discovers, one must assume as a correlate that what is to be discovered, what is hidden in texts, is a static "thing," like a treasure chest, to which all persistent readers will eventually arrive, finding, presumably, the same treasure. To assume, however, that readers invent, that they supplement the text, is, I hope, to reinvigorate the possibility that not all readers are the same, and that

what they find is not always, or maybe never, the same thing that other readers find. Or, should I say, what one reader *invents* is not necessarily going to agree with what any other reader invents. Relationships to texts remain fluid, opening up the potential for inventing relationships between texts, between texts and things or texts and ideas or texts as ideas, that are always various and variable. Part of the crises of representation and epistemology that Blake confronted involved how to manage being in a world that did not allow for such openness and potential difference.

The Argument in Brief

I make the argument that Blake's marginalia are part of his composite art (just as they are part of his anti-Newtonian poetics) in that annotation represents the un-fixing of the fixed, authorial perspective by another hand, voice, or eye (all of which go to form a particular perspective independent of the one, or ones, already represented on the page); the energy of the marginalia can function to open up play, disorder and difference just as Blake's text and illustration often work to direct the reader away from reading simple one-to-one relationships between text and illustration. The act of annotation represents a serious challenge to the implied authority of the finished page, and specifically reminds of the role that materiality plays as we build meaning. To mark by remarking the page is to reassert textuality.

Tearing the book, the metaphor of my title, is to destabilize claims towards unequivocality, or un-equi-vocality, or not equal voices, which certain kinds of argument make upon the page (especially argument that takes its own textuality as transparent).

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The "torn book" is the page revealed as a site for contestation, a site from which the voices silenced by singular authorship (and thereby, authority) can reemerge.

The purpose in suggesting connections between otherwise disparate thinkers, as I do in my final chapter, is to develop a kind of energy within the current project in order that it never be entirely closed; by suggesting how "disorder" operates in various contexts, I hope to set the conditions under which my own work can remain itself always potentially energizing and less prone to the closure of any final, comprehensive statements.

Blake's work did, in fact, create a new kind of space, a new experience of reading (at least for me as a reader), in which textual instabilities and interventions could function positively to inform and energize critical practice. While I have not risked textual disruption here, I have tried to at least highlight my own self-consciousness about issues of language, discovery, invention and meaning, and the possible consequences of developing a systematic argument, or arguments.

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THE TORN BOOK:
FIXITY, FLUIDITY, DISORDER AND ENERGY
IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S MARGINALIA

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Chair: Donald Ault
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William Blake's marginalia receive little critical attention. Yet they are deeply

embedded in contemporary currents in Blake scholarship, including those which attend to

the material and textual dimensions of Blake's work, to his anti-Newtonianism, and to his

anti-systematicity. The marginalia are part of Blake's composite art, in which elements

that share the same page are made to illuminate one another, though often in seemingly

contradictory ways. While Blake's marginal notes may comment directly on particular

sections of the text at hand, they also function as textually disruptive on the page, forcing

the reader's awareness of the degree to which formal layout and features like pagination

guide our reading. The marginalia often work counter to the control imposed by the

finished, printed page. Thus the marginal notations are textually and materially

meaningful. Study of the original volumes reveals a number of textual and material problems that seriously complicate the ways in which the marginalia have been treated to date, since they remind that the page does not necessarily give transparent, uncomplicated, or unproblematic access to "ideas" behind the words. The marginalia participate deeply in writing, reading, authority, and the production of meaning, as those issues circulate throughout Blake's work. Ultimately, the degree to which disorder functions as part of the annotated page resonates with other critical projects which look to interrogate, and suggest alternatives to, that which is overly systematic and repressive.

CHAPTER 1
BLAKE'S ANTI-SYSTEM COMPOSITE ART

I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals?
Why live in unquenchable burnings?
- The Book of Urizen, Copy C II:4

Introduction

In Chapter 1 I situate my work in two major areas of Blake scholarship: Blake's

anti-system project, and the nature of his composite art. I discuss how critics like Donald

Ault and Stuart Peterfreund have suggested ways in which Blake was using his poetry and

illuminations to construct an anti-Newtonian poetics. Also, I confront Blake's composite

art as it is explored by critics like W. J. T. Mitchell, in which text and illustration often

work in self-conflicting and disruptive ways.

Blake is deeply concerned with the tension between the fixity of the metal plate

yet the fluidity of his poetic vision. Thus the themes of writing and reading, and the

attendant symbols of books, pens, hands, readers and writers, form one of the most

elaborate and important contexts in Blake's work. I consider in detail the "Introduction"

to the *Songs of Innocence* and *The Book of Urizen*, in terms of how they develop a

specific conception of the artistic process (one in which there is considerable tension

between creative energy and the necessity of having to fix that energy into material form

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on the page), and how they suggest Blake's deep concern for the materiality of making art.

The metal plate, the book and writing, figure centrally in Blake's poetry as part of his anti-Newtonian, anti-system project to create a different space, or experience for the reader reading his work. The torn-book, an image which provides my title, represents the deconstructing, or tearing, not just of "the book," but of all that the book is made to represent in Blake's work, in terms of abstract systematizing, and suppressing individual, creative vision by fixing abstract systems in writing.

Part of the anti-Newtonian project, and the creation of a new space of poetry, is what has been called Blake's "composite art": the combination of text and illustration functioning in complex and fluid ways upon the page. Below, I develop the relation between Blake's anti-Newtonianism and his composite art. The way in which Blake forces the dialectical interaction of abstraction and representation, as W. J. T. Mitchell has called them (38), challenges the otherwise empirical weight of the page as ground for argument, for the relationship between the particularity of each "page" (or of any one perspective) is often made to grate against whatever pretensions towards universality the page (the book, the author, the perspective) might make.

William Blake

A little biographical information might be useful for setting up what I would like to highlight regarding the historical Blake: his status as a literary figure and his relatively late entrance into the Western canon (and the misconceptions which surround[ed] Blake as a canonical figure–thus my use of more popular sources like anthologies and dictionaries); and the material conditions of his life as both artist and engraver which so

deeply impacted the form and content of much of his poetic work. Most English literature anthologies introduce William Blake by way of reference to the view held by most of his contemporaries that he was an eccentric or a curiosity. "Earned a meagre living working for publishers as an engraver," begins the Penguin *Dictionary of Art and Artists* entry on Blake. These more popular renderings are, in fact, in line with many scholarly conceptions: W. J. T. Mitchell writes that "of all the major artists and poets of the English Romantic movement (in which [Blake] was a marginal, isolated figure), he was the slowest to achieve critical acceptance as formally and intellectually coherent" ("Chaosthetics" 443). Northrop Frye, writing as recently as 1947, felt compelled to "complete the destruction of the myth that Blake is a literary freak" (*Fearful Symmetry* 148). Even Coleridge as a relative contemporary of Blake, writing in 1818, seems surprised to read, for the first time, Blake's *Songs* (first published 29 years earlier, in 1789), suggesting the limited degree to which Blake was in cultural circulation: "I have this morning been reading a strange publication . . . Poems with wild and interesting pictures . . . printed and painted by the Author, W. Blake" (quoted in Bentley, *Records* 251). And William Rowland, in *Literature and the Marketplace*, writes of Blake's "struggle for economic survival" and his "situation as a man caught between two worlds, an inspired prophet who must make a living in the world as he finds it" (81-82). So how did this poet and engraver manage to produce such vivid, imaginative works throughout his life: (1) knowing that even the small audience he had likely would not understand his vision, and (2) caught between his work as an engraver and his work as a poet? To many, Blake was no more than an eccentric man, practicing a style of copper plate engraving

that cost a great deal in terms of time, energy and money, but that yielded little in the way of a mass producible result–and this in an age when Josiah Wedgwood was beginning to mass produce art on pottery and china (Ackroyd 65). While Blake never rejected artistic exploration or invention, even in the form of new ways to execute artistic ideas, he never condoned the idea of mass produced art or what it did to artists: it turned them from inventive creators into mechanical producers. It was just one type of system against which Blake's art often seems to work.

<div align="center">Blake's Anti-System Project</div>

Blake characterized the empirical ethos as a "Single vision & Newton's sleep," against which he juxtaposed a "twofold," and even "fourfold," vision tied both to the rational and the imaginative worlds (Letter to Thomas Butts in Erdman 722; Blake quotations are from David Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* unless otherwise noted). Donald Ault has characterized this single vision as having its primary drive "toward realizing the coherence and completeness of a narrative world or text . . . and toward realizing a preordained 'end' or closure that resolves conflicts into a unified whole" (*Narrative Unbound* 4). Blake's idea of poetic inspiration remained "incomprehensible / To the Vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted & single vision" since it retained complexity and contradiction which would not submit to resolution (*Jerusalem* 202). It is Blake's conception of the Newtonian impulse and its limited and suppressive vision against which he would construct his own system of visionary myth and prophecy.

To suggest that impulse in the Newtonian narrative toward closure and resolution, take, for example, the letter Sir Isaac Newton wrote to the Royal Society in 1672: "this

analogy 'twixt colors and refrangibility is very precise and strict; the rays always either exactly agreeing in both or proportionally disagreeing in both" (Newton). Newton was writing about his experiments with light and the conclusions he reached about the rules that governed refraction. Among those conclusions, he noted that light of a certain wavelength (what he knew as colour) would always be refracted by a prism (light's refrangibility) to the same degree, while light of a differing wavelength would be refracted in a proportional distance that never changed. Red light, for example, would always fall in the same place in the prism's rainbow, a constant proportional distance from all the other refracted colours. Alexandre Koyré has described Newton's findings here as "the indestructible linkage between degree of refrangibility and color" (45). What is clearly important for Newton is that he has discovered, he claims, a system, a method, for describing observed phenomena, and for predicting the details of those phenomena as they might occur at any future point in any given place. Thus the "indestructibility" that Koyré emphasizes, which is itself one of the central tenets of the systematic project that Blake found to be operating in what he called "Newtonian." Those tenets include language taken to function as mere description, prediction into the future by abstracting from certain details (while repressing others), and the claim to universality. Notably, the central "Newtonian" figure in Blake's work, Urizen, writes in his book of "*eternal* brass" (*Urizen*, 72; my italics), and elsewhere broods "in horrible fear of the future" (*Four Zoas: Night the Seventh*, 354).

Blake and Newton

A word on "Newton," "Newtonian," and "Blake" is probably in order, since it is important to reflect on what those terms mean for the present comparison and contrast. Thackray writes, in *Atoms and Powers*, "Newtonianism [meant] many things to many men" (5). And Perry Miller, in "Bentley and Newton," notes that Newton himself was not quite a "Newtonian" (277). Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers observe that "ethics and politics" drew on Newtonianism (27), and Alexandre Koyré writes that "all the new sciences that emerged in the eighteenth century . . . tried to conform to the Newtonian pattern of empirico-deductive knowledge" (19). We need to be careful and not take mention of "Newton" on Blake's part to necessarily coincide with some bio-historical figure from the 17th century. Nor should "Newtonian" be taken necessarily to describe anything about Newton's method per se, since it became, after Newton, a cultural development all of its own. Newton and "Blake's Newton" are very different things, and Blake's critique of "Newtonianism" operates on a much wider social level than just commentary on a particular scientific method or cluster of ideas.

In fact, the historical Newton, at least what we might construct based on his own writings, and the historical Blake, again, what we might construct from the art he left us, may have been more similar than the usual binary opposition assigned to them would suggest. Of course, Blake himself seemed to align his art directly against Newton (explicitly at any rate); however, there are perhaps some similarities worth noting (without, hopefully, overstating the case).

Blake and Newton were greatly imaginative systematizers, forced to confront and deal with gaps in systems of explaining human experience and natural phenomena. Admittedly, Newton and Blake reacted very differently to the gaps any system seemed to have. Newton looked for a suture: a predictive method which could describe and unite the variability of the micro- and macrocosms he explored. Blake, however, forced disruption, discontinuity and incommensurability, producing an art he hoped would reflect and embody the feelings he had of experience, and which would communicate the primacy of the individual imagination. As such, Blake's is often called an anti-system project (or poetics), and that it certainly is. However, Blake's work itself is certainly not without systematic, or at least systemic, elements of its own.

Certainly Newton was aware of his work as systematic, though he may have tried, overtly, to deny its breadth. In a letter accompanying his "Hypothesis on Light" in 1675, Newton claims that the letter itself, as with the introduction to the "Hypothesis," is to illustrate his optical papers only: "that no man may confound this with my other discourses, or measure the certainty of one by the other." But, as Richard Westfall notes, "it is quite impossible to reconcile the actual 'Hypothesis' with Newton's deprecations of it . . . The 'Hypothesis' contained much more than an explanation of optical phenomena" (270). Proposing the idea of a universal æther with implications well beyond the nature of light, Newton spends half the "Hypothesis" offering what Westfall describes as "a general system of nature" (270). And as Newton must have foreseen, the ideas he expressed began a new round of disputes and controversies with Robert Hooke and the Royal Society. Newton's fear that his ideas on light, no less than his ideas on a general

system of nature, would surely "ingage [him] in vain disputes" and "controversy" suggests the degree to which he was aware that even his most experimentally sound system would not satisfy all those in the scientific community given the potential gaps and inconsistencies it was sure to have (Newton quoted in Westfall, 269).

In the case of Blake, recall that he may not necessarily be as anti-system as he is often claimed to be, or, perhaps, as he often claims himself to be. Even arguments against Blake as a kind of systematizer fall back into the language of systems. Donald Ault attempts to reassert the context of Los's statement (in *Jerusalem* 10:20), "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" to remind that it is not Blake's statement necessarily. Ault writes that "Blake's treatment of Los's system . . . is not without irony . . . Blake's reaction was against *all* systems." Yet further he writes, "Blake's 'system' is poetic or visionary" (*Visionary Physics* 29). Ault might place 'system' in hesitant quotation marks, but there still seems to be poetic construction going on for Blake on the level of perceptual framework, which is systemic if not systematic. It is likely best to speak of a Blakean system of poetry advisedly (as Ault does). But I maintain that there is a project going on in Blake's work which is not so fluid or deconstructive as to elude the "systematic" entirely. Some contend that it is Blake scholarship which renders Blake's work systematic, not the work itself. Steven Shaviro considers this possibility: "Blake is interpreted systematically because it has been assumed . . . that Blake's works do in fact constitute a system" ("Striving With Systems" 272). However, I think there is too much explicit evidence in Blake's art that suggests dependence on systemic ways of reading (and which therefore required systemic ways of

writing) to claim that systematicity is laid over Blake by scholarship, and not in part drawn out by it.[1]

For example, Robert Gleckner writes that "each of Blake's two song series . . . comprises a number of smaller units . . . so that the relationship of each unit to the series as a whole might be stated as a kind of progression" (10). I contend that Gleckner is not making a system where one did not previously exist, but pointing to systematic relationships that are inherent in the work, even when we take into account that Blake shifted the plate order of the songs in various editions. One might argue that nothing is inherent in a text until it is created by the reader. But by this logic, if you can argue that Blake's system only appears so because readers make it so, thereby derailing my contention that Blake is, in some ways, systematic, then we can as easily say that there is no systematic project in Newton either, since it is only the reader of Newton who creates a system, not Newton himself. For the purposes of the comparison it makes possible, I will contend that there can be things in texts which are not merely the product of reading. Or, if all things in texts are the product of reading, then certain consistent patterns must emerge from all *competent* reading, that is, reading sensitive to the resonances and self-reflections the text invites.

So I think Gleckner, for example, has noted something in Blake which, unless one were to practice bad scholarship, cannot go unnoticed: a relationship of units which form a progression. While I do not subscribe to the linearity of Gleckner's "progression" model –if by that he means each poem necessarily follows one from the other–I think the relationship of units he suggests is both productive for reading Blake's work, and

evidence of a kind of Blakean system. And certainly there is nothing to say that the units themselves cannot shift and change, especially as plate orders change. Indeed, the artistic techniques Blake used throughout his career to create the same "units," as Gleckner calls them, varied enough that figures which appear to invoke a particular type often grew out of very different material processes. Consider the "old man" in plate 2 of *All Religions Are One*, relief etched and printed in monotone, to the "old man" (and child) in plate 84 of *Jerusalem*, relief etched but with added watercolour and pen and touches of gold. Compare either of these techniques, themselves different enough, with pencil sketches, for example, like the "Head of Job" (Keynes, *Drawings of William Blake* 74). They are all the old man, and thus invoke a particular symbolism, but each seems different enough to potentially disrupt the very symbolism it imports.

W. J. T. Mitchell, whose Blake studies capture more of the poems' fluidity than do Gleckner's, cites instances of "illustrations which do not illustrate" to show how Blake forces us to read pictures "in the context of other, similar compositions" (*Blake's Composite Art*, 4-5). Again, this suggests a sort of archetypal system or network in which illustrations import symbolism from other contexts in which they've appeared. Mitchell later writes that "Abstract linear forms such as the vortex or the circle provide the structural skeletons" for much of Blake's art; and they are "repeated so *systematically* that they suggest a kind of . . . repertoire of leitmotifs that can be repeated in widely differing contexts" (37; my italics).

In order not to overstate my case though, it is clear that where Newtonianism required that gaps and inconsistencies in the system be either filled or erased (or avoided

with covering letters), Blake's system highlights incommensurabilities as fundamental to the human condition. Lest we charge Newton with believing too unquestioningly in the comprehensiveness of his system, though, we might recall what he was reported to have said to his nephew, Benjamin Smith:

> I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to
> myself I seem to have been only like a boy, playing on the
> sea shore, and diverting myself, in now and then finding a
> smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the
> great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.
> (quoted in White, 343)

Ultimately, I am much more concerned with "Blake's Newton" as a poetic figure, than with Newton as an historic figure; certainly the two are not identical, nor, perhaps, do they even share as much in common as we might assume. And I am concerned with Newtonianism as Blake engaged it: not necessarily just a set of procedures practised by a man in Cambridge, but the cultural movement that had become Newtonianism by Blake's time. (Koyré writes that even by the end of the 18th century, "Newtonian science seemed to reach its final and definitive perfection" (17).) Blake engaging "Newton" or "Newtonianism" is complex, for as Donald Ault, following Thomas Kuhn, writes, "in the years following the emergence of Newton's paradigm . . . Newton's system insinuated itself into a vast range of intellectual disciplines" (*Visionary Physics* 46). And Alvin Toffler, introducing Prigogine and Stengers' *Order Out of Chaos*, writes that the "Newtonian model gave rise to analogies in politics, diplomacy and other spheres seemingly remote from science" (xxiii). In fact, it is most likely that Blake encountered Newtonianism through the textbooks he was engraving, or perhaps in reading through the

libraries of friends like the publisher Joseph Johnson. I would say issues of whether Blake actually read anything by Newton are much less central here than the pervasiveness of systematized ways of thinking and organizing culture that Blake chooses to embody in his poetic "Newton" (and in other figures, like Urizen). Whether Blake is "right" about Newton *per se*, is less important, for me, than what develops from Blake's critique, and what new things and ways of thinking he makes possible.

Donald Ault writes that "to most Newtonians there was no question whether a logical system could explain the whole of the world; the only question was, which system could best characterize nature's inherent logical structure" (*Visionary Physics* 28). And Peterfreund reminds that "up to Blake's time, the response of eighteenth-century literature to Newtonian science is unanimous in its belief that Newton's mathematics and physics are fully disinterested, inductive, impartial and authoritative" (21). Newtonianism became the set of keys–even *the key*–which would reveal the logic of action at a distance, light, alchemy, and the Bible. Toffler writes that in the Newtonian system, "every event was determined by initial conditions that were, at least in principle, determinable with precision. It was a world in which chance played no part, in which all the pieces came together like cogs in a cosmic machine" (xiii). Newton sought an all-embracing model of the universe on both microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. Biographer Richard Westfall notes that Newton presented himself often as a "natural philosopher confronting the entire sweep of Nature" (270), and Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs writes that "to Newton himself all his diverse studies constituted a unified plan for obtaining Truth" (17). Anachronistically speaking, it is surely this Newton–the totalizer–and his belief in some discoverable

system to unify, and to explain the connections between, quite simply, everything, that Blake picks up in his creation of Newton as a poetic figure.

Certainly Blake's relationship to the Newton he creates is complex, however much Blake aligns Newton with other poetic figures like Urizen, and however much Newton and Urizen represent the most reprehensible (for Blake) impulses in culture to abstract, universalize and control. We need go no further to discover some of this complexity than Blake's 1795 painting entitled *Newton*. Here we find, I think, both a clear critical stance by Blake against systematic projects like Newtonianism; yet there is also the added dimension of Blake's own implication and participation in that system. It is this duality that I would like to keep foregrounded throughout my discussion.

Blake's "Newton"

In Blake's portrait (if I can call it that) of Newton, Newton is more Greek god than Cambridge loner (Figure 1-1). His is a body of material potential. He traces or measures a figure which seems to cause and to mirror his own. In one sense, the figure's muscular body bends to produce the Euclidean triangle on the page, yet the placement of the scroll at the figure's feet also *causes* the body to take the shape it does; he *must bend* to the ground to reach it. The "Newton" of the picture is both producing but also produced by his measurement; perhaps we can see depicted here Blake's "same dull round" wherein "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. The Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again . . . He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only" ("There is no Natural Religion," 3).

This circularity–Newton both creating yet being shaped by his creation–is crucial to Blake's Newtonian critique in the painting, since it implies his larger critique of a kind of language, or a use of language, which assumes itself to be entirely passive and not in any way involved in inventing that which it purports to discover. That is, it is a language which presents itself as both transparent and uni-directional. It is assumed to flow as description towards objects which exist a priori of that description. However, Blake is clearly aware that language is a much more powerful tool, and that it creates the stuff of science and art and life as much as it describes. Thus, without seeming to be aware of it, the figure in *Newton* is as much controlled, and bent nearly double, by the written triangle, as he is in control of it.

Note how the figure's right hand forms a triangle of its own with the knuckle of the middle finger and the pointer finger forming two sides while the scroll itself forms the base. Note again how the left hand forms a triangle with the bent pointer finger as two sides and the compass as a base. In the pencil sketch for Newton (see Keynes *Drawings of William Blake* 18) there is, in fact, an additional triangle which does not appear in the colour print; it is formed by the figure's index finger, the extended middle finger and the compass. (In the sketch, Newton's fingers seem decidedly disproportionate. The middle finger which extends down the compass, and which goes to form a triangle that does not appear in the colour print must measure at least the length of the left forearm.) It is revealing, I think, that many of the figural triangles which emerge are formed by some *combination* of the human figure and the apparatus of his science. It is also noteworthy that Blake would use the triangle as his basic, repeated shape here, and that triangles form

one of the most basic mathematical shapes in the figures which accompany Newton's own works, like the *Principia*. (For readings of *Newton* see Donald Ault's *Visionary Physics*, 2-4; and W. J. T. Mitchell's "Chaosthetics: Blake's Sense of Form," and *Blake's Composite Art*, 49.)

In terms of language then, for Blake it is clearly at least bi-directional, that is, it describes, but also creates in that description. Thus it can create away difference while posing as description; further, it can mask a subjective voice by presuming objectivity. Thomas Kuhn, in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* describes the effect: "normal science . . . often suppresses fundamental novelties [differences] because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments [its abstract models]" (5). And further, certain experiments are often ignored if they "[yield] neither consistent nor simple results . . . they [remain] mere facts, unrelated and unrelatable" (35). Umberto Eco offers another version: "we travel knowing in advance what we are on the verge of discovering . . . Someone discovers something different and tries to see it as absolutely analogous to what he already knows" (54, 74). Peterfreund describes Blake's reaction to this (mis-)use of language (denying its power to create what is assumed to exist) in terms of an understanding

> that all texts, as the artifacts of specific individuals writing
> in specific contexts of time and place, are rhetorical, or
> argumentative, and that the situation could not be
> otherwise, since all language is produced by individuals
> speaking from positions . . . accordingly, there is no such
> thing as disinterestedness . . . no authority, only usurped
> freedom. (22)

For the Newtonian text to claim authority is, in Peterfreund's reading of Blake's

critique, only for the text to usurp the power of readerly interpretation under the aegis of

textual control, itself girded, in Newton's case, by claims to the empirically verified

"rightness" of the argument. Blake imagines the power and variability of language in

Jerusalem in a conversation among the Four Zoas, the "Visionary forms dramatic":

> creating exemplars of Memory and Intellect
> Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonder Divine
> Of Human Imagination, throughout all the Three Regions immense
> Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age[;] & the all tremendous
>   unfathomable Non Ens
> Of death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent varying
> According to the subject of discourse & every Word & Every Character
> Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the
>   Translucence or
> Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Time & Space
> Which vary according as the Organs of Perception
>   (*Jerusalem*, Plate 98: 28-39)

Here language is recognized as a subject-dependent instrument of creation. No claims

to authority are made, beyond the assertion that every word and character vary

according to the individuality of their speaker.

Blake's critique of the Newtonian system focuses on that system's denial of the

power of language, thus its power of abstraction, thus the tendency for systems to

prescribe a futurity which suppresses the detail of difference in order that the system

maintain itself. Blake will present this closed circularity often, though most notably in

the inescapable circularity of Urizen measuring the world that he has produced, yet

producing the world by measurement. For Urizen forms his weights and measures

before exploring his surroundings; "He formd golden compasses / And [then] he began

to explore the Abyss" (*The Book of Urizen*, VII:39-40). There seems no escape from

the process of creation-as-measurement that figures like Urizen and Newton are caught

in. (I look specifically at *The Book of Urizen*, written during the same time period that

Blake worked on *Newton*, in greater detail in Chapter 2.)

To return to Blake's *Newton*, though, it is important to remember that while the

figure certainly dominates the work, the background is equally revealing. Against the

definite outline of the figure, Blake offers an ambiguous background which seems at

once ocean, land, rock, vegetation and an accident of watercolour. *Newton* is one of

twelve large colour prints Blake produced in 1795. There is debate surrounding the

exact technique he used, but it likely employed either millboard or metal plate. While

Frederick Tatham reports that Blake used millboard, Raymond Lister, in *Infernal

Methods*, suggests that "the effect could have been obtained from a sheet of zinc or

copper" (59). (Tatham's account is provided in Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* on

page 366, but it could not have been from firsthand knowledge; Tatham was not even

born when Blake was developing the technique in the early 1790s.) Blake etched or

painted his design (in the reverse direction of what would appear in the final product)

either on the millboard or metal plate, and then pressed the design to paper. He could

then add different paint to the millboard or plate and press the design again. This

produced a "mottled" background, or, as Michael Phillips writes in the Tate Gallery's

William Blake exhibition catalogue, "highly reticulated surfaces often of great richness

and individuality" (106-107). It is certainly this individuality–the accident of colour–

which informs the critique at work in the colour print.

In "Chaosthetics: Blake's Sense of Form," W. J. T. Mitchell reminds us that "when seen in the context of late-eighteenth century printmaking . . . his [Blake's] handling of color is notoriously indifferent" (444). Indifferent to what though? Convention? Outcome? Mitchell writes further that "Blake clearly *intended* his art to look the way it did," and that the sorts of questions Blake forces deal as much with "moral, political, and metaphysical" issues as with aesthetics (445). What comes from Mitchell's discussion, I would argue, is that Blake was really *not* indifferent to his handling of colour, however much he might have invited chance into his creation. That is to say, in creating the background to frame Newton, Blake did not seem to set out to create a certain pattern which he could have predicted before it came to be; however, Blake is clearly aware of (not indifferent at all to) the effect he wanted and the technique which would produce that effect. Blake might have been indifferent to colour, but certainly not to its handling. Mitchell describes the technique Blake used to produce the background effect; he assumes that millboard, and not a metal plate was used: "this sort of color printing involved the application of colors to a piece of millboard that was then pressed against the paper and pulled away, leaving an *unpredictable* and random pattern of mottled impressions" (455; my italics). In addition to Blake's awareness of colouring and of the material used to register paint to paper (either metal plate or millboard), it is also possible that Blake was highly aware of the paper itself, and the way in which it would take up colour. Very close study (7x magnification) of the original *Newton* on display at the Tate Gallery in London reveals that the paper itself seems to have just enough texture to make exact copies impossible,

and even to produce what often appear to be figures, letters, even words that almost but do not quite emerge. This is particularly true of the pencil sketch for *Newton* that Blake executed. While there does not appear to be any actual writing under magnification, with the naked eye, the light pencil shading Blake has used to indicate the background tends to catch the minute wrinkles of the paper in such a way as to suggest writing that has been lightly erased. Thus Blake seems to have been aware of the potential for near emergence inherent in all aspects of the colour printing process, not just the pressed millboard or metal plate.

Robert Essick, writing on the recently discovered copy E of *The Book of Urizen*, notes Blake's "purposeful incorporation of the accidental with artistic production" (102). Ironically, Essick confronts the issue of intentionality as it arises in relation to another of Blake's backgrounds. (Though background, in this case, produces what Essick calls "the most significant design variant" (101).) In Plate 9 of copy E, Essick notes what "looks like a grazing horse, complete with an eye and slight indications of a nose" (101). The eye and nose are created by denser spots of colour printing. Essick writes, "there is no evidence of work with brush or pen . . . Thus, the horse-like image may be an accidental product of color printing rather than the result of an intentional act" (102). As with the Newton background, we see here a certain kind of intentionality: at the very least, an awareness of consequence. "Blake *chose* color printing," as Essick notes (102; my italics). Did he choose it because it rendered unpredictability and chance variation? Does meaning thus emerge differently from different kinds of intentionality?

The question in regards to the *Newton* print remains though: How does the background, so different from the strength of line in the figure, function in terms of the critique at work in the print? Can we even call it a "background" given the negative valence that term carries. Is Blake playing with our sense of background as somehow secondary, even marginal? Do we assume the figure is therefore foreground and central? What status do we accord these formal parts in their ability to critique one another?

It is most easy to see "Blake" in the indefinite background whose fluidity is meant to suggest the fluid multiplicity, an endless detail of difference, denied by the Euclidean triangles in the foreground. There is certainly a degree to which the individuality of each work, a result of the technique and materials Blake has chosen to use, works against notions of systematic reproduction. Ironically, the effect of near emerging writing or forms that is available in the original material disappears when the work is reproduced by most methods in books today. Under 7x magnification, the pencil sketch reproduction in Martin Butlin's *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* is revealed as columns and rows of perfectly ordered tiny dots, an image of identicality itself (this is particularly true for the background). William Blake has made certain aspects of his work entirely unreproducable, as though to guarantee at least those aspects against mass production as a kind of system deeply associated with the Newtonian system against which Blake worked.

The material and technique themselves are used to critique the very image they produce. But I think Blake is as much the Newton figure as he is the chaos of the

setting. Some critics have even suggested that the Newton face is that of a younger

Blake (Ackroyd, 201). Peter Ackroyd writes:

> there is no reason to believe that Blake thought of
> Newton as a very different kind of writer from
> himself. Indeed there is an intensity about this
> image that suggests he recognised the creative
> importance of the scientist's vision . . . Perhaps
> also, in this contemplative figure, there is some
> suggestion of the obsession and isolation that
> were part of Blake's own experience. (201)

Ultimately, I think Blake was too aware of himself as an artist in a Newtonian

world to completely extricate himself from the material conditions of that world. Nor,

does it seem, did Blake *want to* remove himself from the tensions and contradictions

which accompanied his work as a poet and engraver. They were, in many ways, his

source material for thinking through the fluidity of poetic vision and the necessity of

activating that vision by fixing it on the printed page. Chapter 2 deals, in greater detail,

with the tension between fixity and fluidity in Blake's work, and the degree to which

Blake participated in both the fluidity of poetic imagination yet the fixity of setting

imaginative vision onto the material page.

Anti-System Summary

I have situated the crux of what has been identified by various commentators as

Blake's anti-system (or anti-Newtonian) project in the operation of language/design

itself, extending to the page, books and writing as key components in stabilizing and

perpetuating any system. I am casting the assumed stability of language/design on the

page as "fixity," thus giving me that part of my subtitle, "Fixity, Fluidity, Disorder and

Energy." Fixity implies singular perspective, univocality, and the suppression of anything that might alter and upset the operation of the fixed system. Those elements which operate to counter "fixity" I would like to group under the heading, "fluidity," the second term in my subtitle. To suggest that those elements which operate to de-stabilize the foundation upon which fixity depends are "fluid" helps to ground my thinking in the very materiality of Blake's artistic production. For if the copper plate implies a kind of fixity by its very hardness, then I think the acid mixture and watercolour washes imply a fluidity which is no less related to physical, artistic production, yet which counters the solidness of the metal plate. Blake presents this opposition in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as one between the "books [and] . . . libraries" of received ideas ("the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation") and printing in "the infernal method" with "corrosives" which reveal error (Plates 14-15). I would like to now suggest ways in which Blake encounters (and counters) fixity by means of what has been called his Composite Art.

Blake's Composite Art

Poems with wild and interesting pictures.
- Coleridge describes Blake

Stephen Kellert writes, in *In the Wake of Chaos*, that chaos theory is not "as interesting as it sounds" (ix). Part of what I think he means is that chaos, the thing itself, the set of behaviours that it is, might be pretty "interesting" (as in "exciting," "energized"), but the theory of it, the writing about it, is not. Sadly, there is not always profundity by association in scholarship. Or, it is not always possible to make the

product of one's study as dynamic or challenging as the *subject* of one's study; and it is rarely possible, when dealing with a subject involved in a far reaching cultural critique, to avoid entirely some of the pitfalls that that critique points to. Having said this, perhaps as a sort of pre-emptive self-defence, I want to now engage Blake's art from a "different" angle, and divide my discussion between Blake's anti-system project and his composite art, knowing full well that such a division is arbitrary and likely runs against the grain of many of Blake's moves to unite contraries that had otherwise been artificially divided. For despite calling this section "Blake's Composite Art," it is really still deeply tied to his anti-Newtonian, anti-system project. The purpose of division here is very much functional, since it allows me to situate my own project in terms of certain scholars who have concentrated primarily on Blake's *art or* primarily on his anti-system project. There is a tendency, it seems, to privilege one over the other. Or at least to always address one just as a component of the other. I cannot claim to be doing something entirely different here; however, if I ever do privilege one perspective on Blake over another (the compositeness of his art over the anti-Newtonianism, for example), I hope there are as many instances of that privileging reversed.

Ultimately, it is clear that the way a composite art can be made to function on the page–that is, its form–to force disruption, non-linearity between text and design, conflict, or change, is an outgrowth of content. Blake's composite art will not submit to the kind of reading which requires the stability of traditional or simple relationships between elements on a page (graphic to text or graphic to graphic). The instability Blake forces between the parts of his composite art (if it can be divided into parts)

marks one of the most anti-Newtonian aspects of Blake's page. And it is important to recall, again, as Donald Ault has written, "'Newtonian texts' are by no means restricted to Newton: his is simply an extreme form of narrative stance which Blake's narrative systematically opposes" ("Incommensurability" 159).

Imagine how "design" interacts with text in something like Newton's *Principia*: a good example of a systematic book whether Blake actually had the opportunity to read it or not. (Ault contends that "it would seem Blake did have some firsthand information about Newton's ideas" (*Visionary Physics* 45).) There must be a direct and clear relationship between what is being written and what is being drawn for the argument to work, and thus for the language used to communicate the system to reveal the supposed unambiguity of the system itself (which is supposed to exist prior to its description). Indeed, the graphical is simply *another way of saying* what the text has already said. Take, for example, Book I of the *Principia*, Section III, Proposition 11: "Let a body revolve in an ellipse; it is required to find the law of the centripetal force tending toward a focus of the ellipse." Newton continues, "Let S be a focus of the ellipse. Draw SP cutting both the diameter DK of an ellipse in E and the ordinate Qv in x, and complete the parallelogram QxPR" (462). It is likely second nature for us to accept the imperative voice of the Newtonian narrator and to "let" the figure accompanying the text do exactly as the narrator says. Or, to more accurately reflect our relationship to the text, we will "draw" or "cut" or "complete" the figure as we are told to do by the narrator. Following from this, we trust the narrator to be describing the process of creating the figure such that it parallels the argument it accompanies. All told, we relinquish our power of

interpretation (and, indeed, action) in allowing the Newtonian narrator to dictate the direct relationship between text and design and to thereby assume complete control over meaning.

Part of what Blake's composite art questions though are the assumptions of authority and control over interpretation made in demanding such direct text and design relationships. One might simply argue that Blake is doing art and Newton is writing a scientific treatise: of course things are going to be different. But that is exactly the point. Blake chose to work in such a way as to reveal some of the things that the Newtonian text takes for granted, and to question what sorts of implications would arise from that, and he could only do so by creating a very different kind of reading experience on his own page. Indeed, Blake's art requires that there be space for the reader to grasp the text as sometimes self-reflexive, sometimes ironic, sometimes not offering the most simple relations between its parts. Ault writes in "Incommensurability" that mathematical notation and the graphic illustration which accompanies it "cannot bear an ironic or parodic relationship" (164). In denying the potential for irony, the Newtonian text denies the reader entry into the meaning making process for there can be no multiple senses in which a text can exist.

For Newton, text and design together are assumed to reveal the ultimate unambiguity of nature, and thus must themselves present, in their relationship to one another, an equally stringent unambiguity. Newton even stressed the need for singular clarity in his analysis of The Book of Revelation: "God who knew how to frame it [that is, put the Apocalypse into language] without ambiguity intended it [clarity of

description] for a rule of faith" (quoted in Manuel, Appendix A). As Ault notes, "It is quite clear that this Newtonian voice equates 'multiplicity' with 'confusion' and therefore needs to ground his direction of the reader's responses in a similar need for reduction of multiplicity to univocality" ("Incommensurability," 162).

In setting Blake's composite art as a reaction to text-design relationships in the Newtonian text, it is most important to note that the Newtonian relationship between text and design must be singular, permanent, and stable ("unambiguous" to use Newton's terms) if the system is to function as universal and fully predictive, just as Newtonian reading must arrive at a singular ("correct") interpretation, thus proving and further guaranteeing the univocality of the text as final authority over its own meaning. This connection between univocality, or single-voicedness, and textual authority will become crucial in subsequent chapters which look at the act of annotation as a multiplying of voices on the page, and thereby as a direct challenge to authorship (ownership of meaning on the finished page) as guarantor of singular interpretive authority.

Approaching the relationship between elements on the page from a different perspective, one might say that the reversibility of time supposed to inhere in classical science is made to inhere in the description and argument of that system whereby the reader must be able to travel from text to design or from design to text without interruption or complication at any moment in the process of reading. In this sense, there can be no *interference* between elements which go to illustrate an argument. The space of the text must be an absolute space like the one Newton posits in the *Principia*:

"Absolute space, of its own nature without reference to anything external, always remains homogeneous and immovable" (408). We cannot read the relationship between text and graphic on page 60, for example, only to find that the same graphic is doing something entirely contrary on page 120, that is, interfering with what we have already read. The potential for interference would act as an initial clue that ambiguity might exist where the Newtonian text would prefer to remove it entirely. Certainly ambiguity would suggest that the Newtonian text was losing control over itself, relinquishing meaning, rather, to the reader and to the variability of readerly (or context specific) interpretation.

Such is the space of Blake's art, wherein readers are forced to deal with perspectives that change almost as often as we turn the page; thus, elements on the page are set up so as to interfere with one another, and to always comment on their appearance elsewhere. (Interestingly, a working model of glossing.) Time, the arrow of our reading Blake, moves in one direction, since Blake is constantly inviting interference: if you read about Los in *The Book of Los* and then find him different in *The Book of Urizen*, there is no going back and undoing your first knowledge. If you encounter the child perched directly atop the head of the Bard in the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Experience*, you must consider that image as it intrudes upon its counterpart: the child *unattached* to the piper in the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*. I argue that Blake's insistence upon contraries throughout his work demands that we navigate interference as an inescapable part of Blakean reading.

The insistence to cause interference we find in Blake's work cannot be said to exist in something like the ideal system-of-the-world textbook. If you read page 200 first, in which "Figure III" (whatever it might be) illustrated some point made in the text; then you read page 3 in which "Figure I," the same triangle, perhaps, as in Figure III, illustrated some other point; the stability assumed to inhere in the one-to-one relationships between text and design would make it possible for the two figures to exist in absolute, non-relative (non-interfering) space. One would not interfere, disrupt, or necessarily change the other. There is "one" way to read Figure I and "one" way to read Figure III, and there is, ideally, no possibility for interference between the two.

The space and time in which text-design relationships in the Newtonian text function is, in some ways, absolute and reversible. You could read Figure III before Figure I as easily as you could read Figure I before Figure III, and because of the assumed autonomy of their relation to the text, there is no "time" in your reading. There is no way in which first readings *necessarily* change future readings. Perhaps it works to say then that time in the Blakean text affects the reader and the text. Whereas time in the Newtonian text might affect the reader (the argument develops, for us, linearly), but does not (ideally) affect the text itself (moments in the text do not alter other moments). I think this coincides with the insistence I (following critics like Donald Ault) find in the Newtonian text to always control itself, to ground itself as ultimate authority over its own meaning. Ault writes:

> The Newtonian narrator asserts the semantic limits of the possible meaning of the text, making the text usurp the reader's role . . . The reader is separated from the text as

the elements of the text are separated, isolated from one another . . . Everything has been worked out by the text. ("Incommensurability," 162-164)

I must stress though, that my argument does not extend to the *argument* put forth in the Newtonian text. For that is surely linear, and it develops in time. Certainly we could not start at the end of the *Principia*, read backwards, and hope to understand. Thus time, in this sense, is clearly not reversible, and it does need to move in one direction if we are to comprehend the text. What I am arguing is that relationships between text and design (or portions of argument and their attendant figures) operate outside of the time of our reading them in the sense that the stability of those relationships is not interconstitutive; text-design stability inheres regardless of what we have or have not seen before in the book. In *Narrative Unbound*, Donald Ault deals with the complicated text of the "unfinished" *Four Zoas* as it represents one of Blake's anti-Newtonian texts. For Ault, "there are no context-free universal propositions in Blake's poetry" (488, note 1). And the "experiential significance of an event is determined by its location . . . in the temporal series" (492, note 20). To me, the degree to which Blake's poetry is context-sensitive speaks to its more general sensitivity to time. Indeed, it depends on what Ault describes as "a reader whose perception is able to alter the very being of the text's supposedly fixed facts" (6). The argument I have been developing here is specific to the compositeness of Blake's art, in that any of Blake's text-design relationships are equally sensitive to context (there are no universal relationships?) as well as to readerly perception. This dependence on time, rendering our sense of it as so immediately irreversible (and thus each new poetic thing we

encounter as constituted, in part, by all previous things), is, I maintain, a direct outgrowth of Blake's stand against that characteristic of the Newtonian text which conjures away the reader by asserting text-design relationships which can operate outside of time, outside of context, outside of our process of reading. The imperative voice of the Newtonian narrator tells us what is to be done to figures accompanying text and tells us what figures and text mean by way of thoroughly disarming our power to make text-design relationships do or be anything other than what the narrator demands.

For Blake, deeply concerned with the effects such a reading practice produces (in terms of locking readers into one reading, one relationship with the text, and removing the text from the possibility for self-reflexive change), it is not surprising that his critique of systems would force an entirely different reading practice, and thus the look of his page would differ greatly from any page involved in trying to assert a total system (be it a *Philosophiae Naturalis de Mundi Systemate* or not). Take, for example, Plate 4 from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The graphic "illustrates" a contest between contraries, as the text on the same plate discusses. Roughly two years later, Blake produced a very similar figural pattern and scene in "Good and Evil Angels Struggling for Possession of a Child" (Figure 1-2). Aside from having the figures reversed, Blake very nearly repeats himself. However similar the pictures are though, they are deeply relative to their specific contexts. The space of Blake's art is by no means an absolute space. More importantly, the time, or process of our reading, simply cannot be reversible, for our seeing of one instance of the figures must inform (interfere with) our next seeing of the same figures. The relativity of one to the other speaks to

the irreversibility of the practice of reading which Blake forces. Consider also some of the more common figures which show up throughout Blake's art. For example, the Old Testament patriarch, Urizenic figure who may, or may not always represent Urizen. The old man who appears in the graphic which accompanies "London" (though there are no old men in the poem) certainly interferes with other instances of the old man figure appearing elsewhere–the "Ancient of Days" for example (himself interfering with *Newton* as they both hold a compass). Most notably, the figural arrangement in "London" appears in *Jerusalem* on Plate 84, where the text identifies the old man *as* London, being led through the streets "by a child" (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake*, 363). At least there is the potential for one appearance to interfere with any other (regardless of the chronological order of their publication). And clearly Blake invites such interference by depending on what critics like Mitchell have called the "lietmotifs" of repeated types (37). In contrast, the ideal Newtonian text denies the possibility for interference as a necessary condition for proving the stability of the system of the world. And it does so by forcing only one relationship between figure and text–a relationship that remains undamageable by past and future reading, thereby rendering the notions of past, present and future irrelevant.

In terms of Blake's art itself though, there is much more to be said about the relation between text and design aside from issues of time. Despite what often appears to be a visual *separateness* of text and illustration on the Blakean page, there is evidence that Blake may have thought of the two elements in very similar ways. If anything, Blake's composite art brings the supposed sisters of painting and poetry together, not so

much for a family reunion, but rather to interrogate what might be a false division and

separation between the two. Or Blake seems to be challenging any "unification" of the

sister arts which attempts to make one do what the other normally does. Mitchell

describes this, in *Blake's Composite Art*, as trying to make "pictures 'speak'" or "poetry

visual" (34). Blake's critique seeks for some more fundamental way to unify, or seek

connection between, things which have been divided. Mitchell reads in Blake the

impetus "to discover a new basis for . . . unification" (34). Thus, for Mitchell, the

compositeness of Blake's art involves as much the combining of two different kinds of

representation (text and picture), as it involves the search for "the parallel engagements

of imagination and body with their respective mediums, and in their convergence in the

more comprehensive idea of the 'Human Form Divine'." (34). Mitchell finds in Blake

that "the body and the imagination are separable principles only in a fallen world of

limited perception, and the business of art is to dramatize their unification" (35).

Important for this project is to note how complicated the interaction is between

what we can sometimes (but not always) identify as the graphic versus the textual on the

Blakean page; especially important are the kinds of disruptions and discontinuities

which can be forced when we must consider the textual alone, the pictorial alone, and,

more often, the combination of the two operating in conflicting ways. But it may only

be our reading strategy, and not Blake's, that wants to see text and illustration as

different elements working on the same page. We must recall that when Blake

engraved, he had to write backwards on the copper plate (a skill he often practised in his

notebooks). Words took on the form of pictures themselves, and often in the leaves and

twining vines that encircle Blake's text, we can almost see words that are struggling to form themselves and break free of the bound plate. The intertextual windings lead our eye from text to graphic as though we are to read picture just as we have been reading text. Note Blake's *Laocoön* for an example of "text" and "illustration" which seem to force the shape of one another (Figure 1-3).

There is some scholarship which ignores either text or illustration and concentrates on one of the two elements. Heather Glen, for example, offers an elucidating reading of "London" in her *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's "Songs" and Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads."* Yet her argument thoroughly ignores the illustration (110ff.). The complex nature of the relationship between text and illustration in much of Blake's work really does require at least a nod to both, however. This is especially true for a poem like "London" in which the illustration(s) (a young child (?) leading (?) an old man; a figure warming (?) his/her (?) hands by a fire; bear no immediate relationship to the text). Erdman's speculations on what the illustrations illustrate are almost entirely derived by importing symbolism from other poems; for example, "Another vagabond boy at a smokier street-fire than the family's fire in the previous page ["The Little Vagabond"] . . . His [the boy's] flame we have seen in miniature under the title of 'Holy Thursday'" (88).

Note also, for example, the illustrations in Figure 1-4 from *America*; Erdman identifies the figures as Urizen and Orc (*Illuminated Blake*, 146-148). The complicated system of differences and similarities between the contrary characters, their strikingly similar poses yet clear contextual differences, and further, the relation between the two

which develops as we read from Plates 8 to 10 and beyond suggest that such an easy 'naming' is potentially misleading. On Plate 8, it is as though Urizen, seated above a textual block, looks "up" towards what we might imagine as Orc, when, on Plate 10, we see Orc looking "down" from beneath a textual block (Erdman, 146, 148). But there is no reason to assume, as Erdman does, that the figures are Urizen and Orc at all; if they are, their near-identical poses suggest that a more complicated reading is necessary than labelling them as binary Reason-Imagination, Bad-Good opposites. The text makes reference to other characters who might be represented in the illustration. "Orc" on Plate 10, for example, may just as easily be the fiery Angels alluded to in line 1 of Plate 11 (who are, themselves, aligned with Urizen's "clouds" on Plate 8, yet they "burn with the fires of Orc," pictured on Plate 10) . In fact, the line suggests that the figure is Orc–"burning with the fires of Orc" (Plate 11, line 2)–occurs *after* the figure itself which is on Plate 10. All of this is to suggest the fluidity (or capacity for change) with which Blake presents the characters of his myth, and with which we must read relationships that develop between characters, and between illustration and text.

To set Blake in a general tradition regarding his use of text and illustration, he is both following and reforming the Whitney emblem tradition (see Figure 1-5). Whitney's text and illustration are kept clearly separated on the page–indeed the picture is framed within the frame of the printed page. Yet the poem elucidates its attendant illustration directly, "What hideous hagge with visage sterne appears?" (192). Unlike what we might expect from Blake, Whitney answers his own question, offering a textual explanation of his illustrated "Envy." Whitney even glosses his own work, referring to

"Envy's" tradition in literature and offers a Latin motto and an accompanying aphorism.
In the Whitney tradition, correspondence between all elements of text and graphic are
clear and direct, creating what Blake might have recognized as a kind of system of
signification that was extremely limiting and highly didactic. However much Blake is
informed by the Whitney emblem tradition and by the Gothic art he so prized, Blake
introduces an element of fluidity to the otherwise fixed system of meaning and
correspondence.

The complexity of Blake's approach to uniting the visual and verbal is most
fully captured if we can consider the interplay of textual and graphic as dialectic;
however, it is a kind of dialectic which keeps thesis and anti-thesis from a final, ending
synthesis. Thus text and graphic inform each other, but do not necessarily progress into
some final, closed unity. However, W. J. T. Mitchell describes Blake's combined text
and illustration in his *Blake's Composite Art*:

> neither the graphic nor the
> poetic aspect of Blake's composite art assumes
> consistent predominance: their relationship is
> more like an energetic rivalry, a dialogue or
> dialectic between vigorously independent
> modes of expression. (4)

The use of "dialectic" here seems rather loose, given that Blake's "dialectic" is so clearly
different, even antithetical, to the dialectical process of thesis => antithesis => synthesis.
Indeed, Mitchell's point about text and illustration is that one *never* synthesizes the
other, though he does not interrogate his own use of the concept of dialectic. In
contrast, Stuart Peterfreund asserts that "William Blake rejects the proposition that

human understanding arises from dialectical logic" (38). That is, where binaries are concerned, one need never occlude the other, in the process of it becoming known or understandable. Thus Urizen is both Blake himself and Newton at the same time. Or, as Blake writes in the "Grey Monk," a "Tear is an Intellectual Thing" (489, l.29); it is not emotional *or* rational, but both.

Mitchell's sense of the dialectic in Blake changed markedly from his 1978 *Blake's Composite Art* to his 1996 "Chaosthetics."[2] In "Chaosthetics," Mitchell writes that "terms like form and chaos, sanity and madness, are dialectical categories that are mutually necessary to one another for their meaning." But further, "they cannot be resolved in some higher synthesis (Hegelian or otherwise) but are continually reinscribed as boundaries of the thinkable" (448). To grasp Blake's use of the dialectic as an organizing principle, we likely need to reconsider the very grounds for an argument that would assert any singular and consistent use of any one kind of dialectic (or non-dialectic, for that matter). For indeed, there are likely many instances of Blake putting various kinds of dialectical relationships into play. In terms of the compositeness of Blake's art and whether there is one nameable dialectic relationship which remains constant as far as text and design are concerned, it is likely safest to conclude that there is no one type of relationship that inheres *all the time*; rather Blake's composite art forces us to evaluate each text and design combination as we come to it, in its context, and in context of what we have previously seen. As Fred Dortort writes, "Not simply dialectical in the sense of one being in opposition to the other, the interaction between text and graphics continuously fluctuates" (23).

However much the reader might vacillate regarding the nature of Blake's dialectical procedure though, it is clear that the often-quoted "without contraries is no progression" dictum is more complicated than just some master progress-narrative of repression and obliteration, which Blake's England had likely taken to heart all too readily, and which Blake scholarship sometimes takes at face value (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate3). Thus we must read Blake's composite art with the sense in mind that text and illustration are likely to function in more complex ways than one-to-one relationships, but that those complex ways are not always predictable or the same.

Certainly, when we encounter illustrations which, as Mitchell writes, "do not illustrate" it is more likely an artistically competent move by Blake than a mistake (4). As Ault writes in *Narrative Unbound*, "Conflicting statements [and illustrations?] may function to open up a play of differences rather than to indicate Blake's confusion" (xvi). It is these "differences," and the openness of Blake's poetic page, that suggest ways in which he was able to retain a certain fluidity in his work despite the apparent fixity of the printed page.

Composite Art Summary

The nature and function of Blake's composite art are deeply tied to the tension between fixity and fluidity Blake felt in producing his imaginative vision in the material world, for the appearance of the Blakean page, and what it forces us to confront as readers, is intensely bound up with Blake's anti-Newtonian project. That is, in place of the Newtonian text, which claims for itself objectivity and which treats language as a tool for description, not creation, Blake presents us with words and characters, figures

and shapes, which always seem to assert their own contextuality, and thus their

openness to our supplement of reading. Most important for the discussion which

follows is the degree to which Blake's composite art, in making material Blake's

challenge to Newtonian "single vision," forces us to deal with text and design

relationships which often operate in disruptive and self-conflicting ways. And it is the

fundamental challenge to the authority assumed by the Newtonian narrator (as

interpretive guarantor of its own text) which operates in Blake's composite art that I will

argue to be operating with equal force through Blake's marginalia.

In Chapter 2 I will examine more closely the tension between fixity and fluidity

as Blake expresses it in his work in order to more fully explore that cluster of symbols

which includes the book, the metal plate, writing and reading.

Notes

1. To situate this discussion in terms of my earlier invention versus discovery
discussion, I need to clarify that what inheres in a text is, arguably, there to be
discovered. However, I think Blake's art in particular is of a type that invites this kind
of discovery, only to require a certain revisionary invention. That is, it is a process of
discovery which undermines itself as discovery at numerous key junctures. In this
sense, the reader seems always required to (re)invent his or her reading strategies in
order to manage non-conventional textual moments. Again, Calvino recalling Barthes:
"Barthes tends to think of literature as the awareness that language has of being
language, of having a density of its own, and its own independent existence" (28-29).

2. Mitchell's use of "dialectic" in terms of Blake's work had, in fact, changed by his
1994 *Picture Theory* in which he notes that "interactive opposition" in Blake is "not
necessarily resolution or Hegelian synthesis" (114, note 8).

Figure 1-1 William Blake's "Newton" (Ault, *Visionary Physics*, frontispiece)

Figure 1-2 "Good and Evil Angels Fighting for Possession of a Child,"
and detail, Plate 4, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
(Ackroyd *Blake* book cover; Bindman 110)

Figure 1-3 William Blake's *Laocoön*
(www.betatesters.com/penn/)

Figure 1-4 Urizen(?) in "America" and
Orc(?) in "America" (*Blake's 'America: A Prophecy' and
'Europe: A Prophecy'* facsimile Plates 10 and 12 Copy M)

Figure 1-5 "Envy" from Whitney's *Choice of Emblems* (94)

CHAPTER 2
FIXITY AND FLUIDITY

There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made.
- Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (4)

What a book talks about. How it is made. What is the connection? Deleuze and

Guattari suggest that there is such a deep connection between what a book talks about and

how it is made that the divide between subject matter and the process of creation

disappears. Important for the context of such a claim, however, is their conception of

what an "author" is, and thus what goes into making a book. Deleuze and Guattari write

of themselves as authors: "each of us [is] several . . . we have been aided, inspired,

multiplied" (1). And later, "There are no individual statements" (37). This is to suggest

the complex multiplicity of drives and desires that intersect at those moments we name

(invoke the name of) an author; an author is not a stable, unchanging unity, or a coherent,

repeating philosophy, however much that model might be idealized by reading practices

that seek stable and coherent meanings in and between texts (and thus stable and coherent

authors as guarantors of that meaning).

Much of the early critical work on Blake, even the projects that brought Blake into

the Western canon, tended to treat "Blake" as a smooth set of practices and beliefs that

did not contradict or interrogate each other. It seems as though systematizing Blake, or

finding Blake's system, was assumed to be the only way to save the poet from early

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charges of eccentricity and madness. (Joseph Farington, a member of the Royal Academy, writes in his diary: "Blakes eccentric designs [to Young's *Night Thoughts*] were mentioned . . . Hoppner ridiculed the absurdity of his designs . . . They were like the conceits of a drunken fellow or a madman" (Bentley 58).) Northrop Frye, writing around 1947, tells us in his opening sentence that *Fearful Symmetry* "offers *an explanation of* Blake's thought" (3; my italics). And anything admitted to the "canon" of Blake's work "not only belongs in a unified scheme but is in accord with a permanent structure of ideas" (14). The tense dualism that requires Blake consistently be *either* mad *or* sane informs Frye's work, since it functions to gauge the success of the critical project itself; if Blake can be proven sane, criticism has done something worthwhile. Curiously though, the need to *prove* a structure in Blake, the requirement to untangle contradictions, speaks as much in unison with those voices who would charge Blake with madness as against them. For Frye persists in his deeply systematizing project (which itself is to *discover*–never to invent–the systematic and coherent structure of Blake's canon) while arguing that Blake "demonstrates . . . the sanity of genius and the madness of the commonplace mind" (13). Frye, in developing the importance of Berkeley's dictum *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived) in understanding Blake, forces the possibility that, if Blake is perceived to be mad, then perhaps he is mad. But while Frye does not address the tension his own work elicits, I would argue that it should fall to criticism now, not to prove that Blake is sane, but rather to question "madness" itself as a politically and culturally formulated category. Critical work may raise such questions implicitly by disavowing the impulse to explain by systematizing, which often amounts to proving

"sanity" by ignoring "madness." W. J. T. Mitchell, in "Chaosthetics," allows for the possibility that "Blake was a bit mad some of the time, in different ways on different occasions, and that he was equally sane (also in different ways) on others" (448).

In addition to *Fearful Symmetry*, works like S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary* show that need to *explain* Blake as a consistent and reliable author in order to prove his sanity, again as though the requirement to explain did not just as easily confirm Blake's "madness." The tension that inheres in Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*–between declarations that Blake is not mad, which depend on proving a Blakean system, and our ability to show that system only by flattening contradiction–informs Damon's book as well. For example, Damon writes with confidence that "'gold' signifies 'intelligence'" (xii). But 3 sentences later, "Blake's symbols are not mechanical or inflexible" (xii). Damon asserts that "[Blake] introduced flat contradictions, which can be resolved only when the meaning is understood" (x). But what if the contradiction *is* the meaning? Or what if what Blake *meant* was to create a text, a space for the reader, which made contradiction possible, even forced it as a condition of reading? What new kind of reading does this require? Damon continues, "System there is, but it must be discovered" (x). And further, "The purpose of this dictionary is to make things easier for readers" (xi). Interesting to note is that critical programs like Damon's are often accompanied by an equally rigorous and systematizing (that is, normalizing) editorial policy (more on Blake anthologies below). As Damon notes, "like all Blake scholars, I have felt free to repunctuate in the interest of clarity" ("Note" 1).

The impulse to *explain* as it manifests in editorial decisions is evident in what seems the usual, and for that reason transparent, practice of grounding Blake's poetry in reference to literary "tradition." For example, David Worrall, in his *Urizen Books*, offers this textual note to accompany Plate 3, verse 1 of *The Book of Ahania*: "Fuzon's chariot echoes Milton's 'Chariot of Paternal Deitie, / Flashing thick in flames' in *Paradise Lost* . . . For other flaming horses and chariots see Butlin [nos. 385, 386, 390]" (184). What does this note do? Milton's verse itself could be explicated with reference to further sources; we are offered a curious kind of information in this textual note. It seems haunted by the spectre of a critical desire to prove Blake's "sanity" by *traditionalizing* him: showing what or who Blake is like, what he might have read, or what he might have seen. The very concept of an echo is confusing in this sense–echo: "the repetition of a sound caused by a sound wave coming against some opposing surface . . . to imitate . . . to flatter slavishly" (Webster's 127). Does Fuzon's chariot do something outside the text? Does the reader (only Worrall?) call into the caverns of his or her reading experience in hopes of hearing something back? Does the text itself voice something? Does it hear back? When does echo stop being echo? When the chariots no longer flame? Certainly such a textual note is a valuable *piece* of information, and I am not suggesting it be removed. But is it all we need to know, if we need to know anything? What motivates the editor to provide such information and how does it affect the possibilities of our reading?

Here and Now

If there is a fundamental difference between projects which explain Blake to make things easier and the present one, it is that I am not trying to smooth contradictions or tensions, so much as I want to draw attention to them and consider what develops from leaving them in place. That is, what happens if we can learn to read with difficulty instead of with ease? What happens when not everything fits, or when everything fits in different ways?[1]

In this chapter, I pursue the tensions introduced by Blake as a deeply self-reflexive author, and I examine the explicit way in which the subject of Blake's books, that is, what they talk about, is deeply connected to how they are made. Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler, in their "Introduction" to *Unnam'd Forms*, suggest that Blake's was a "print consciousness" and that "material traces of Blake's writing practice . . . [are] an integral part of whatever artistic meaning can be read in Blake's texts" (6). What Deleuze and Guattari highlight for me, as I try to extend my reading of Blake as an artist aware of material processes, is the conception of the book as always a production of print consciousness, but one stemming from an "author" as intersection of multiplicities (perhaps multiple multiplicities, and perhaps self-contradictory). The page (the many pages of any author) is thus a site for many, potentially contradictory, self-interfering impulses and pressures, which find their way from writing practice to printed page.

In this chapter I look at Blake's "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* and *The Book of Urizen* (mainly as they are printed in Erdman's *Collected Poetry and Prose of William Blake*), in addition to other of Blake's work, in terms of the tension between fixity and fluidity, although these terms are by no means themselves *always* mutually

exclusive, or fixed. Generally, I pursue the fixity of Blake having to attach what he called

Poetic Genius, or inspiration, to the material page (and thus to participate in limiting

imagination to the frame of the book), contrasted to the fluidity Blake seemed to have

believed to inhere in the poet's vision and in the "infinite" he alludes to in *The Marriage

of Heaven and Hell*. I set up the conceptual fixity-versus-fluidity framework in order to

further elaborate books, writing and reading as elements of one of the most persistent and

present constellation of symbols throughout Blake's work. (Erdman has called a portion

of this "Blake's workshop symbolism" (*Illuminated Blake* 13).) This context will

become extremely important for subsequent chapters in which I set Blake's marginalia as

a practice deeply informed by (and informing of) Blake's theories of reading and writing.

Important for chapter 2 is to examine how Blake is implicated in the fixity/fluidity

tension, since he must, due to the material conditions of book production, fix his fluid

vision to the page. Blake's willingness to implicate himself in processes otherwise

associated with such figures as Urizen (and Newton), such as binding vision into book

form, suggests to me the complexity with which Blake approached his work as an artist in

what Stuart Peterfreund called "a Newtonian World" (*Blake in a Newtonian World*).

<center>Books: Real and Ideal</center>

The process of much of Blake's art, his writing practice, was a physical and

material one, often more muscular than just pen and paper would require. The tools of

Blake's work included the graver, the burin, acid washes, metal plates, and a rolling press

with 4 foot spokes, used as handles, to turn the press. (The Tate Britain's Blake

exhibition had on display a press similar to the one Blake would have used; Abraham

Bosse's "Cette figure vous montre Comme on Imprime les planches de taille douce"
[Tate #99] shows an apprentice printer using both hands and a foot to turn the great
wheel.) Blake describes his method in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as "printing in
the infernal method" (Plate 14). "If the doors of perception were cleansed," he writes,
"every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite" (Plate 14). It is important to note that
Blake posits his printing method, the infernal method, as a way to produce books, as a
way to teach a certain kind of reading and, ultimately, a certain kind of perception. His
process of relief etching was, in fact, directly contrary to the standard method of the day,
intaglio engraving (a technique Blake would have learned as an apprentice and at the
Royal Academy) (Ackroyd et al. 104). Thus what the book is about, ultimately, is how it
was made, for it is made to teach (by requiring) a different kind of reading strategy. The
book printed in the infernal method is to communicate a depth and clarity of vision.
Deleuze and Guattari pursue their own version of this book, suggesting that "the ideal for
a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority . . . on a single page, the
same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social
formations" (9). Nothing would be hidden.

But this is the ideal. In the real world of books, even *A Thousand Plateaus* is
bound by the conventions, the material necessities, of ink and paper and hands turning
pages. They have attempted to confound traditional reading, to counter "the State as the
model of the book" by writing in "plateaus." They write, "a book composed of chapters
has culmination and termination points." But plateaus "can be read starting anywhere and
can be related to any other plateau" (22). (Of course, we still cannot begin mid-sentence

somewhere in the book and hope for things to make sense, so really, we cannot start "anywhere.") For Deleuze and Guattari, the form of the book is a political option: one choice among many. "To attain the multiple," they write, *"one must have a method that effectively constructs it"* (22; my italics).

Blake's method is clearly set up to oppose certain reading practices; for him, creating form is also choosing a political option. I covered this, in part, in Chapter 1 in my analysis of Blake's text as anti-Newtonian. But if the ideal is to print in the infernal method, to reveal the infinite, to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority, to make all interpretive options equally accessible, then what is the reality of the book? And how does that reality intersect with the very reading practices Blake works against? Take, for example, the reality of a Blake edition like David Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Northrop Frye described Blake as the "victim of anthologies" because of the limited way in which they tended to represent the artist. Beyond the "dozen or so of his lyrics," normally collected in the anthologies Frye was familiar with, "we are threatened with a formidable bulk of complex symbolic poems known as 'Prophecies'" (3). But even if anthologizers now feel less threatened by collecting more than just Blake's lyrics, Frye's assertion continues to hold true.

Blake is still the victim of anthologies, even of anthologies like Erdman's: likely the best available edition in terms of inclusivity, textual notation, and affordability. It aims "to supply a sounder more uncluttered text for reading than has been heretofore available" (xxiii). However, we know that it includes only a fraction of the artwork

which is to accompany Blake's texts. (And only some artwork which is to stand alone.)

As Donald Ault writes in "Unreading 'London'"[2]:

> in its [Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*] attempts to approximate through conventional printing methods the subversive materiality and visual dimension of variant copies, this text acknowledges not only the radical openness of Blake's poems to conflicting readings but also . . . the resistance of these poems to being "read" at all, in the conventional sense of that verb. (132)

Erdman's edition typesets what should otherwise appear in handwriting. It chooses among many possible textual variants. It regularizes lettering, capitalization, sizing, spacing, even punctuation at points ("Most of the corrections of text have been small, corrections of spelling and capitalization and of editorial bracketing or spacing" (xxv)).

My point is certainly not to disparage what is the most accessible Blake edition available; I use it throughout the present work. In fact, many Blake editions do not even consider that textual, let alone narrative, inconsistencies (so-called) might be intentional and thus should be reproduced, or that interpretive possibilities (intentional or otherwise) opened by a text, rather than being regularized and shut down, can be made to remain open. Duncan Wu, in his commentary to *The First Book of Urizen*, asserts that the "I" of stanza 2 is "Blake, the poet, receiv[ing] the dictation of the Eternals" (100). And in *The Book of Urizen* as anthologized by Johnson and Grant, the editors assert that "*The Book of Urizen* is *about* Urizen but not *by* him" (140). However, one could just as easily assert that the "I" is, like the only other "I" in certain copies of the poem, Urizen himself, and that the book is the book *of*, as in created/owned/produced by, Urizen. Viscomi, following many other commentators, notes that the title *The [First] Book of Urizen*

"underscores the idea that *Urizen* is a parody of Genesis, the first book of Moses" (280).
Clearly Genesis is not the first book *about* Moses but, traditionally, *by* him; to suggest
that a book *of* Urizen is as much by as about him is not such a stretch.

Perhaps it is even Urizen, not "the poet" (if even that is necessarily "Blake"
himself), who hears the Eternals "gladly" because he can take their version of the story
("of" Urizen) and put it into his own words, thus offering his perspective (line 5).
Consider how radically this alters our reading. If Urizen is writing for himself the words
of the Eternals as they are spoken to him, then lines like "He strove in battles dire / In
unseen conflictions with shapes / Bred from his forsaken wilderness" (Plate 3, 13-15)
become the cry of an oppressed hero who is struggling to survive despite having been
forsaken by those who might help him. If we believe Wu, and Johnson and Grant, that
Urizen is not speaking, but is being spoken of, then we must close the possibility that
Urizen himself has been forsaken, for line 15 would imply that the wilderness has been
corrupted by Urizen's presence, not that it and he have both been abandoned.

The fact remains that there is simply no justification for assertions like those of
Johnson and Grant or Wu which look to control by limiting interpretive possibility, other
than to make things *easier* for the reader. Indeed, denying one interpretive choice which
we might make based on the title alone, before even getting to the text, closes down
innumerable possible interpretive branchings that might result. My general point is to
highlight the reality of books, writing and reading, and the problems printing and
production introduce into our study of any text or version. In this I feel the tension
between fixity and fluidity–between stable meanings and changing possibilities–which is

to inform the readings I make of Blake's work in this chapter. There are, finally, certain pragmatics we cannot idealize away.

Fixity, Fluidity, Inspiration

Much of the fixity-fluidity tension arises from the way in which Blake expresses his conception of poetic inspiration and artistic execution. Take for instance, the implicit tensions on the artist in the 1809 *Descriptive Catalogue*. Blake writes in defense of "representing spirits with real bodies" in painting (541), suggesting that there is something different in the real bodies than in the spirits which they represent. Specifically, Blake is referring to the work on display at his 1809 exhibition, held at his brother James' shop at the corner of Broad Street, Golden Square, in London. He describes one work as "the spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan" and another as "the spiritual form of Pitt, guiding Behemoth" (528-530). Blake makes clear his conception of the bodily form as something different though derived from inspiration. That spirits are bodied forth by the artist suggests Blake's deep awareness of the processes of mediation which occur between vision and material product.

In defending his style as one of strong outlines (lineaments) against the "blotting and blurring" (529) of oil, Blake makes the case for poetic visions being "organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce" (541). The artist's vision comes to him "minutely organized," and thus he must create in a medium which allows for such minute organization to be communicated. "Spirits," writes Blake, "are organized by men" (542). There is clearly no interrogation here of that tension between the fluidity of inspiration and the artist having to fix that vision to the

page: it is simply what happens. To complicate matters, Blake seems to be arguing that vision itself is already minutely organized despite it having to be organized by men, thus perhaps mitigating the culpability of the artist in limiting vision to the page. In the rhetorical move which posits a visionary world that arrives to the artist already organized, already "fixed" in some ways, Blake is obfuscating his own complicity in organizing and fixing vision, and thus in limiting imagination. Erdman notes that Blake, as printer, illustrator and publisher of his own work, "guaranteed the direct communication of the author's original and final 'invention' and 'illumination' to the . . . reader . . . of each original copy" (*Illuminated Blake* 10). However, as we see in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake implies that there is a stage prior to invention–a stage of spirits–with which the poet has to contend. So while the communication from invention to reader might be perfect, since Blake executes his own invention, there is much to suggest that the stage from inspiration to invention (from the "spirit" of Nelson to the "real [represented by the artist] body" of Nelson, only *named* as Blake begins to draw it on the page) might be more complicated.

If Blake does not pursue the tensions involved in such mediation in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, we must make allowances for context and recall that Blake is in the business of selling. He aligns himself with a tradition that, in large part, he himself imagines ("Michael Angelo" [sic] and "Rafael" [sic]) and against another (Titian, Rubens and "Correggio" [sic]). Yet he is writing as the voice of one, crying in the wilderness, for his water colours "are regularly refused to be exhibited by the *Royal Academy*, and the *British Institution*" (527-528). In setting himself up as the oppressed artist, Blake,

perhaps by necessity, underplays the sorts of tensions he otherwise elicits on the composite page. In trying to sell his work, Blake is unlikely to present himself as ambivalent about his practice as an artist, and thus he effaces much of the otherwise conflicting tensions apparent elsewhere. Nowhere in the *Descriptive Catalogue* do we find the same sort of ambivalence about such organization that is otherwise so persistent in Blake's work.

One immediately obvious example of this ambivalence is in *The Tyger*, in which the narrator asks himself directly, "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Indeed, even this question becomes "What immortal hand or eye, / *Dare* frame thy fearful symmetry?" by the end of the poem (lines 4 and 24), suggesting that the question is not just one of artistic ability, but is one which involves the choice to transgress some kind of boundary. "Dare" certainly connotes a sense of threat and consequence where "could" does not. The option to transgress also invites the question: whose authority legitimates the boundary to begin with? Is it God's? Tradition's? The Royal Academy's?

Further, as is clear from Blake's drafts of the poem, he chose to change the original "Dare *form* thy fearful symmetry" to "Dare *frame* thy fearful symmetry" (795), likely to evoke even more specifically the materiality of representation. In this poem, composed entirely of questions, the narrator is deeply ambivalent about the artist's capacity to frame the subject in the confines of a representing medium. Indeed, the kind of minute organization called for in the *Descriptive Catalogue* is by no means an uncompromised endeavour if we believe the narrator in *The Tyger*: "On what wings dare

he aspire? / What the hand dare seize the fire?" (7-8). Harold Bloom describes the

illustrated tiger as "a shabby pawn-shop sort of stuffed tiger" with "a confused and rather

worried smile on what the text would hold is the fearful symmetry of his countenance"

(35; Figure 2-1). Bloom seems to work from the assumption that Blake tried to, but could

not, draw tigers very well. Admittedly, it is not a particularly awe-inspiring tiger. (Nor is

the lion in *Urizen*, Plate 23; *Illuminated Blake*, 205.) The point remains, however, that

the illustration does, in fact illustrate what the poem is about, much more than it

illustrates the mere text of the poem. For while the text tells us of fearful symmetry, the

poem is about being afraid of symmetry. So even if Blake could not draw tigers very

well, it is significant that he clearly realized the fact, and from that realization came the

questions we read posed in "The Tyger." Perhaps the fearful symmetry, which the

narrator ascribes to the tiger, speaks more to some impossibility of the poet achieving

symmetry between visions (of tigers, of the cosmos) and what she or he must produce of

those visions in the material world. Is the narrator afraid of the impossibility of achieving

symmetry between vision and execution? Is Blake?

My general point is definitely not to make the charge that Blake "contradicts

himself": that is, at one point he questions the effects of organizing/framing vision, at

another he does not, and at still another, he suggests that vision is already minutely

organized and is thus not limited by the artist. On the contrary, the conception of the

author as a multiplicity, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, would make it quite easy to see

a different Blake writing in each of these instances, and each of them equally "right."

What comes from this does not require that we synthesize the contradictions, but that the

contradictions *as* contradictions speak to a difficult tension between vision and materiality, fluidity and fixity, that Blake himself struggled with constantly.

Working Blake

I discuss Blake's "method," although he employed many, in order to highlight some of the material conditions of his work as an artist and engraver, and in order to suggest how those material conditions influenced his artistic vision. As Jean Hagstrum has written, "[Blake] was deeply involved even in what he rejected" (143). Hagstrum's particular argument focuses on Blake's rejection of the Enlightenment, despite his deep involvement with its styles and ideas. Blake, as any satirist, needed a certain familiarity, needed even to admit a certain implication in and complicity with, that which he satirized. Northrop Frye writes, "it is not so much that Blake is unfair to them [Newton, Bacon or Locke] personally" (187), and later "not one of these thinkers are as opposed to Blake's mode of thought as, for instance, Hobbes, whom [Blake] never mentions" (188). Frye, like Hagstrum, identifies in Blake the impulse he had to involve himself in the systems and ideas against which he worked, at the same time (and perhaps as a necessary corollary) to the way in which he involved them in his poetry. Thus the importance of the "Newtonian world" (as Stuart Peterfreund calls it), and the Newtonian currents against which Blake chose to swim in his poetry. For Blake could not possibly have ignored the Newtonian or imagined it out of his poetry. On the contrary, he imagined it deeply within his composite art, by way of a challenge to what he perceived as its basic errors, that is, its sense of an a priori order to the universe which could be found and described and yet remain unaffected by the inescapable textuality of that discovery and "description."

Joseph Viscomi describes Blake's artistic practice as one in which "the language of the medium frames and generates conception, and in which invention and execution are inseparable" (*Blake and the Idea of the Book* 32). Not surprisingly, Blake often signed his work, "The Author and Printer W Blake," as he did in *Milton* (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 217), in order to highlight the fact that he had kept intact those two elements of artistic production he thought so important: invention and execution. As a working engraver, though, Blake often had to execute other artist's inventions, and, as Bentley's *Blake Records* show, other artists often executed Blake's inventions. For Robert Blair's *The Grave*, for example, Blake made 13 illustrations, though 12 of those were eventually engraved by Schiavonetti, despite Blake having been commissioned by Robert Hartley Cromek to design *and* engrave the illustrations (Bentley 166-172; 617).

Blake writes, in a letter to Flaxman, that "Mr. Cromek . . . wished me to produce . . . about twenty designs . . . [he] has set me to engrave them" (Bentley 168). But in the prospectus to Blair's work, Cromek describes "Twelve very spirited engravings by Louis Schiavonetti, from Designs Invented by William Blake" (169). Inasmuch as Bentley describes Cromek as an engraver "who was just venturing forth as an entrepreneur and promoter" (167), and that the business arrangements between Blake and Cromek for the Blair illustrations were, at best, confused, recent Blake biographer Peter Ackroyd is quite right to have concluded that Blake was "part of the first great period of commercialism and mass manufacture in English history, and he was one of its first casualties" (75). In fact, where Blake referred to "my friend Cromek" early in the Blair project, afterwards, Blake was to write in his notebook, "A petty Sneaking Knave I knew / O Mr Cr------, how

do ye do" (Bentley 171). Likely because of instances like this one, Blake makes clear that one of the many aspects of mass producing art, and of producing art for profit, with which he disagreed most was the separation of invention and execution.

Blake's materials included, at various times, pencil, paper, ink, copper plates, varnish and ground, graver, aqua fortis, water colours and pigment (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 11). While Blake actually practiced a number of different styles of engraving, printing and painting, I focus here on his copper-plate engraving, what he called relief-etching. Blake began with a copper plate, cut to size from a larger metal sheet. He then roughed out his designs (words, illustrations, or both) with white or red chalk. He painted over the chalk outlines with a mixture of salad oil and candle grease. The grease-oil mixture would resist the aqua fortis–made of vinegar, salt armoniack, baysalt and ver de griz–which bit into the unprotected areas of the metal plate. The designs Blake had painted with salad oil and candle grease would appear raised from the plate as the acid mixture bit in. Once the designs had been "revealed," Blake applied ink using a common printer's ball of cloth, and the plate was pressed onto paper. Blake made a preliminary wash for the paper with glue and water, and then hand-painted the words and images with a distemper of water, pigment and carpenter's glue. In some cases, it appears that Blake painted directly on the copper plate; this produces a more mottled, blotchy page. Joseph Viscomi's *Blake and the Idea of the Book* is a minutely detailed elucidation of Blake's relief-etching technique. Viscomi himself prepared plates using what he presumed to be Blake's methods to see what results they yielded.

The significances of Blake's technique are many. It was often a literally revelatory process--as acids dissolved surface layers--and thus deeply tied to Blake's conception of what art should do by way of teaching a different kind of reading, and, by extension, a different kind of being in the world. Whether the material method led to the poetic theory or vice versa is the stuff of chickens and eggs; the two were undoubtedly interconstitutive and operated in a feedback loop. Important is that Blake could unite invention and execution where the mass production of art would divorce those two. Each copy would come out slightly different because of the hand-painting. Viscomi explains that "an impression pulled from a painted plate necessarily depletes the colors . . . if unreplenished the colors produce a substantially less intense image" (280). Oddly, Viscomi refers to this as part of the "exigencies of the technique," though I would argue that Blake chose the technique because it rendered a product most in line with his artistic ideals (280). As I asserted in Chapter 1 in relation to Mitchell's discussion of "Newton," that the technique produced unpredictable results does not suggest that Blake was therefore indifferent to those results. On the contrary, Blake seems to have intended unpredictability, even chaos, in his work--the background in *Newton* for example. Through this type of engraving and printing, and by virtue of the variations it produced, Blake could work against the Newtonian single vision which sought uniformity and intellectual, not imaginative, investigation.

<center>Fixity : Fluidity : Song : Book</center>

In the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*, Blake figures the process of inspiration being given material form on the page. The metaphor which underlies what

might otherwise appear to be the simple action of the poem suggests the impossible dilemma of the artist whose vision comes from the non-rational world of imagination, yet who must fix that vision in material form for it to be shared. The tension between the fluidity Blake associates with poetic imagination and the fixity of the material page is also evident in *The Book of Urizen*. Urizen is situated between the fluid "Eternals" (which represent, to him, unlivable disorder) and the fixity of the world he wants to create (a "solid without fluctuation," he calls it), though both of these "states" are compromised and ambiguous.

As I have suggested previously, in my discussion of Blake's "Newton," for example, there is a marked degree to which Blake implicates himself in the tendencies toward fixity, which, as an artist in the material world, he cannot escape. And so there is a great degree of self-reflexivity, especially in *The Book of Urizen*. For example, Urizen legitimates his authority as creator of a prescriptive world system–the very thing Blake supposedly works *against*–in books of metal which are clearly analogous to Blake's own engraved metal plates. While working through his own implication in and participation with the Newtonian, Urizenic world of systems and metal plates, Blake does fight to retain a degree of fluidity in his work. He produces and reproduces his work in such a way as to ensure an individual uniqueness for each version, and Blake rarely settles on a fixed order for plates within works or for works within collections. The challenge is clearly to any sense of final closure a poetic project might have.

Frontispieces to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

Before looking at the "Introduction" specifically, it is productive to note some of the key differences between the illustration on the Innocence frontispiece and that on the Experience frontispiece; therein we find a graphic representation of the dubious relationship between artist and inspiration Blake will explore directly in the "Introduction" (Figures 2-2 and 2-3). In the Innocence frontispiece, a naked child flies above the head of a bard or piper; Essick's commentary in *William Blake at the Huntington* suggests that "the piper is a persona for Blake himself" (50). The child flies on or with a cloud arrangement compressed within foliage and branches of twining trees which bracket the left and right margins of the page. In this arrangement we are perhaps getting a glimpse of the material world closing in upon the celestial world implied by the cloud and child, just as our progression through the innocence collection will lead us towards experience (we come closer and closer to experience closing over us). Erdman suggests the contrary: "the cloud is . . . *inside the protection* of the branching trees" (43; my italics). Given the constant tension between the vegetative and divine worlds throughout the songs, it seems unlikely that trees would represent "protection" of any kind; at the very least, it may be protection whose positive aspects are haunted by negative senses of enclosure, entrapment and containment.

The realm opened by the child for the piper is identified by Erdman as "that of the imagination" (*Illuminated Blake*, 43). (Consider, however, that the Piper in the "Introduction" to *Innocence* is *already* piping songs when the child appears, suggesting that he does have access to imaginative energy without the child. What the child, in the

"Introduction," seems to provide is more like the impetus to put creative energy into some form which can be shared with others: that "Every child may joy to hear" (line 20); I would still call this inspiration, though of a specific type.) It is crucial to note that in the frontispiece illustration the child and piper are not in material contact with each other; rather, the piper watches attentively, with his pipe ready, looking at/to the flying child whose arms are open in a gesture which suggests he is presenting the heavens above to the piper. Harold Bloom, in *Visionary Company*, asserts that "the design in the frontispiece is of a shepherd dropping his pipe . . . So the *Songs* are not piped" (34); however, it is clear from the picture that the piper holds his pipe, and it is clear from the text that he does pipe a song. (The narrator tells us as much directly.) Bloom's rush to get to the writing of the song misses the progression from pre-linguistic to textual expression so important to the poem.

As the text of the "Introduction" tells us, the child in the poem is "on a cloud," defying the laws of the rational world. However, in the frontispiece to Experience, the "piper" (though he no longer carries his pipe) holds the child (now figured with angelic wings) against his head. The Experience frontispiece does not directly illustrate any specific textual moment, as the Introduction frontispiece does. That such direct relations are no longer present works as a good reminder that we are, in fact, entering into the world of experience, in which nothing is as easy as it was in the world of innocence (if it was even "easy" then). (For example, questions are posed and answered in "The Lamb"; they are only posed in "The Tyger," and then without question marks.) In the Experience frontispiece, the two figures are in direct contact, unlike in the Innocence frontispiece.

Instead of looking to the child for inspiration, the piper seems to have captured inspiration, physically restraining the child against him, and now both figures look out from the page to the reader. Erdman seems to see none of the dark overtones of capture and restraint (even domination and ownership) that I would suggest are operating in the experience frontispiece. He writes simply that the piper's hands "are holding the hands of a naked boy who is not now on a cloud but is winged for potential flight" (70). Essick suggests a parallel to the image of St. Christopher carrying the Christ child across a river (56). Given the context of the "Introduction" to the collection, however, I would argue that the change in the relationship between the piper and child is more ominous than merely "holding hands" would suggest. That the child might be prepared for "potential" flight is less important than the fact that he is *not* flying, and indeed would have to escape the piper's grasp to fly. In addition, the flight would be more "believable" in the sense that the child has wings. Thus his ability to fly would be explained to some degree, especially if we assume that the child is not now a child but a winged angel. In the Innocence frontispiece, the child flies without explanation.

Curiously, the Experience piper steps towards us with his right foot leading, whereas the Innocence piper steps forward with his left foot leading (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 70). Erdman does not comment on the significance of this. Perhaps the piper has implicitly moved, or "taken a step," towards reaching us as readers, in that from looking to inspiration, he has now captured inspiration; the next "step" for the artist is towards the reader. Perhaps, in experience, we are more aware of the artist as mediator between vision and page, where in innocence, we assume no complications between visionary and

everyday worlds. In the Experience collection, we might see the artist having moved towards us; that is, he has become more concerned with (or is now faced with) the world of experience. Despite the tendency to see pictures as "spatial" and text as "linear," it seems that Blake is inviting a pictorial linearity in having the Innocence and Experience frontispieces so clearly connected, though with changes to reflect some progression or movement in the larger thematic story. Mitchell describes this: "any words we find to describe the frontispiece to *Experience* will have to involve transformations and reversals of the language discovered in the poem and illustration which introduce *Songs of Innocence*" (5). As I show below, the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* works through the pattern which implicitly links the innocence and experience frontispieces: the increasing mediation between artist and inspiration. What complicates the "Introduction" to *Innocence* is that sense of the necessity for the poet to fix inspiration to the page, just as the piper is eventually illustrated as seizing and restraining inspiration.

"Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*

The "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* is an apparently simple poem, as are many in the collection. The poem maintains its regular trochaic tetrameter from start to finish with no irregularities, broken words, or enjambments. The A-B-A-B rhyme is only abandoned in stanza 3, in which lines 1 and 3 end with "pipe" and "again" respectively, and in the final stanza in which lines 1 and 3 end in "pen" and "songs" respectively. The first non-rhyme is revealing in that it reminds of the insistence with which the child compels the piper to put his "Piping" into nameable form and content: that is, the child asks for a "song about a Lamb" (line 5). Notably, the child requests that the Piper play

the song "again" and sing the song "again" (lines 7 and 11). It is not until the Piper writes his song down "In a book that all may read" (14) that the child vanishes and thus does not request a repetition. The need for repetition by the artist until the point at which writing occurs suggests the precarious valence writing will have in this poem particularly (as I explore below) and in many other instances throughout Blake's work. For it is a process by which imaginative vision can be shared (without its having to be repeated by the artist), but also the point at which that vision, or creative energy, is forced into one fixed form upon the page and the possibility of its ever becoming something else is closed (though Blake's art certainly works to disrupt that closure to some degree).

The second non-rhyme points to the uneasy relationship between the artist's "pen," as mediator between inspiration and material page, and the "songs" as necessarily mediated forms of inspiration, though perhaps slightly different than their written (not sung) counterpart. The immediate context of the "Introduction" in the songs *of* innocence (either about or from innocence) likely invites a simple reading.

What makes the "Introduction" so fascinating is not that Blake dismisses the rational world in favour of the visionary, but rather that he acknowledges materiality as inescapable: a necessary reality of artistic production. The first stanza introduces the Piper, "Piping down the valleys wild / Piping songs of pleasant glee" (7). The Piper is suggestively representative of the artist, and the simplicity of his pleasant songs is likely meant to remind us of the apparent simplicity of the very *Songs* we are reading. It is also important that the Piper is not silent, and thus not devoid of creative energy. Blake introduces a child in line 3 who immediately defies Newtonian physical law by floating

on a cloud. The child's call to the Piper to "Pipe a song about a Lamb" suggests that he is some form of inspiration, though again, the Piper was not without song prior to the child's call; that "The Lamb" is a poem in the "Innocence" collection, reminds us of Blake's immediate involvement in what is at stake. The Piper responds willingly to the child's call, perhaps as the artist responds to inspiration by giving form to creative energy.

The Piper's art is met by the child's curious reaction: "he wept to hear" (7). We will discover in line 12 that the tears are tears of joy. But that the child cries to hear a song played by the Piper foreshadows the negative aspect of the artist's limiting role in transmitting inspiration or in giving form to (that is, fixing) imaginative energy. It is as though Blake imagines inspiration hearing itself as translated by the artist, and then weeping for what has been lost in that translation. Perhaps there is some part of the child that weeps for the Piper's "songs of pleasant glee" which are now *about* something. The piper's artistic mediation elicits at best a dubious response from the child. In stanza three, the child calls for the Piper to drop his pipe and sing, which he willingly does. And by stanza four, the Piper is called to "write / In a book that all may read" (7). Here is the end of the progression from music to song to speech to printed word: a progression which illustrates the movement further and further away from the Piper's first songs. Thomas A. Vogler, in "Hearing the Songs," describes this movement: "from prelinguistic utterance to its representation and amplification in written language." But, as Vogler suggests, "the process may contaminate its source" (*Approaches to Teaching Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience* 127).

As the Piper begins to write, the child disappears: "he vanish'd from my sight" (7). That is, as creative energy is fixed onto the printed page (it is given definite form), the artist closes the possibility for that creative energy to become anything else. From the moment of possibility, at which the creative impulse might impel the artist to create any number of things, the artist moves towards the finality of the fixed page. (Notably, part of Blake's larger poetic project seems to have been to subvert the fixity and finality of the finished page; examples abound, including re-ordering plates in various works or colouring works by hand in order that each might be different from the others.) However, the fixity of the printed page and the fluidity of inspiration are clearly at odds. Though, as the final stanza suggests, the material page (fixity) and the creative impulse (fluidity) are inescapable necessities if art is to be possible.

> And I stain'd the water clear,
> And I wrote my happy songs
> Every child may joy to hear
> (18-20)

These lines express the complicated tension between fixity and fluidity, and are, themselves, open to different readings which produce different valences for the artistic act. Does the process of staining the water clear it? In this sense, does fixing vision to the page make it clear, as in *visible*, to an audience? Or is the water clear to begin with but then stained by the artist? That is, does fixing vision necessarily limit that vision to one of what might have been many variations? (It is this sense of possibility inherent in creative energy before it is given material form–whether final or not–which suggests to me "fluidity.") That Blake chooses a water image–an overtly "fluid" image–to represent

the Piper's final writing of the song may function to undermine the very fixity such writing suggests. As I had mentioned earlier, Blake seemed to work constantly against the sense of any work being "final" or "finished." Indeed the water image here may allude to Blake's water-colouring of the *Songs* themselves: a process which rendered differences between all the versions.

Finally though, the staining of the water at least yields a material result that "every child may joy to hear" (7). (Adults can perhaps also joy to hear, though that joy may always be tinged by the sense of loss for what *else* might have come from the child's call to the Piper to give form to his imagination. This assumes we can align children with Innocence and adults with Experience, but even that does not seem always to be the case, as in the "Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience*.) But if inspiration is to be shared, it must be fixed to the printed page, otherwise vision remains the artist's alone. The fluid, non-rational world of inspiration is accessible by the artist; but that part of inspiration, perhaps represented by the child, which compels creative energy to be organized into material form, requires that creative vision be fixed in place by the artist's pen. Without the printed page to transmit vision, the artist is no more effective than he who does not accept inspiration at all; the Piper, for example, becomes as solitary with his vision, or with his songs of pleasant glee, as Urizen will later appear with his books of metal.

Orality and Books (Reading Allowed)

My discussion up to this point has not treated one of the major components of Blake's work in general, and certainly a facet of the "Introduction" which needs attention: the orality implicit in song as a form. Recall the rhyme in the final stanza which does not

follow the pattern A-B-A-B: Line 1 reads "And I made a rural *pen*" while line 3 reads "And I wrote my happy *songs*" (my italics). The irregularity in the rhyme draws particular attention to the friction between the pen as an instrument of writing, but song as an oral form. That hearing is a sense more receptive in innocence than in experience is suggested in *The Song of Los*, in which Blake writes, "the delicate ear in its infancy / May be dull'd" as a result of growing into the world of experience (Plate 7, 5-6). (The formation of the senses is generally imagined as a process of contraction throughout Blake's work.) Blake is even said to have sung his compositions at various informal gatherings (like those of the Reverend Anthony Stephen Mathew and Harriet Mathew in Rathbone Place), though none of the music survives, if it was ever transcribed. Certainly Blake would have been familiar with popular song; he did 9 engravings for Joseph Ritson's *Select Collection of English Songs* in 1783 (Bentley 610).

Singing and speaking are clearly powerful forces in Blake's work; they perhaps represent a movement away from the finality of the fixed, written page. The materiality of the voice may have felt less threatening for Blake than the material permanence of graver and metal plate, or even of pen and paper. Thus a consideration of orality bears directly on the larger issues of fixity and fluidity at stake. It is crucial that the narrator in the "Introduction" consoles himself with the knowledge that every child may joy to *hear* the songs that he is *writing*. The important though implicit step is the re-enactment of the words by the human voice to enable a hearing. (We might think, for example, of "The Cradle Song" or "Laughing Song.") As such, even the written word when it is

reproduced has the potential to go beyond the limitations of the page upon which it was written–to be lifted from even the finished page and thus reopened and reconsidered.

Below, I discuss some of the problems that arise for our reading Blake after he has been processed by editors: after punctuation and syntax are regularized for example. But would reading aloud open up these "problem" areas to allow for multiple hearings more easily than a fixed (especially typeset) version does? Take the syntax of "LONDON," Copy G, for example. Blake inserts a period at the end of the first stanza, suggesting that the narrator "marks" just marks of weakness and woe. Stanza two is kept separate from the marking verb. Thus we begin stanza 2 reading towards a new verb, something being done to or in every cry, every man, every voice, etc. But there is no verb to be found unless we read-by-ignoring the period which separates the catalogue of "every's" from "I hear," the first verb to come in stanza 2. Thus, to have access to "mark" or "hear" as the verb connected to the nouns of stanza 2, we must read against the rules of punctuation. (It is almost as though Blake brackets the "every" catalogue with periods to open both verbs as equally accessible, but neither more "correct" than the other, thus emphasizing that it is *our* choice to transgress syntactic, "charter'd"?, rules.) But Erdman, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, eliminates the second period, forcing us to read "hear" as the more syntactically correct verb.

Ironically though, if we were to "hear" the poem read aloud, the multiple semantic possibilities would remain untroubled by the limitations of, in this case, punctuation, so long as we cannot hear punctuation as easily as we can see it; (in other words, more readings are allowed when we read aloud). Even if we hierarchize possible meanings as

we hear a poem (by choosing most likely subject-verb-object connections), those choices are still ours, not subject to an external authority (like an editor). Re-visioning the material page as a space of contested authority will have deep implications for later chapters, in which I consider marginalia as, in part, the creation of dialogue upon the otherwise univocal page.

But what then is the status of "the book" in these *songs*? How do reading, writing, hearing and teaching intersect? Consider that Blake's songs, *Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*, is itself a book taking part in a prominent (and, at the time, lucrative) tradition of children's books–Barbauld's *Lessons for Children from Two to Three Years Old*, for example–which were invariably types of instruction manuals (books for "showing"?) often deeply informed by the Calvinist belief in the inherent sinfulness of children. Calvin writes, "infants themselves . . . bring their condemnation into the world with them . . . though they have not yet produced the fruits of their iniquity, yet they have the seeds of it within them" (*Institutes* Vol 2: 8). Mark Leader, in *Reading Blake's Songs*, notes Blake's immediate involvement in children's literature as an engraver, working on Wollstencraft's translation of Salzmann's *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children*; Blake also met children's authors like Barbauld and Chapone through his connection with their literary circle (4). Blake seriously complicates the implicit belief that children can be instructed, and thus corrected, by virtue of a book; thus the "book" becomes a multivalent symbol whose positive or negative valuation depends perhaps most heavily on what we import as readers in terms of our belief about authority, teaching and books.

The book in Blake's songs is at best a mediator between children and adults, and does not itself represent an artifact of either innocence or experience. The book is certainly not an untroubled source of authority, any more than it can contain a transcendent truth or morality. Like most of the songs themselves rather, the status of the book as "of innocence" or "of experience" depends most heavily on the reader's perspective. Is it possible to extend this argument and suggest then that if children are inherently sinful it is only so in the eyes of the adults who see them as such? The illustration on the *Innocence* title page shows a nurse or mother with a book, and two children, among other figures and designs (Figure 2-4, *Illuminated Blake* 44). The argument goes, as Erdman himself notes in *Illuminated Blake*, that the adult figure *"holds open a book* for boy and girl to read" (44; my italics). Essick notes the critical revision Blake makes to the otherwise common children's book motif of a mother reading to a child: "the heavily dressed mother or nurse *shows* the book to the boy and girl" (52). The activity is apparently innocent enough; however, I would remind that at points even Urizen responds to various interlocutors by stating that if he is misunderstood, or that if his laws seem perverse, everyone should just read his books (see for example *The Four Zoas* VII, 79). And on Plate 5 of *The Book of Urizen* Urizen holds a book open for *us* to read.

The positioning of the book on the Innocence title page in between adult and child figures perhaps represents its ambiguous nature: part of both the world of experience and the world of innocence. Indeed the necessity of learning to reading, that is, being directed into a formal structure of knowledge, is perhaps one of the markers that signals

our progression from innocence (the stage of sounds and voices) to experience (the stage of written argument). The book may be just as much "between" adult (experience) and child (innocence) metaphorically as Blake presents it literally between the figures on the title page. (Admittedly, one of the children is beside the nurse and not separated from her by the book. However, both children are looking at the book and not at the nurse, so the books remains a form of mediation between all three.)

Contrast the attention to orality in the *Songs* with the specific form with which Urizen is associated in the narrative named for him: his is the "book" of Urizen. In all copies but G it is the "First" book of Urizen, suggesting that Blake envisioned more to come in a series (Erdman 804). Most commentators agree that *The Book of Urizen* represents the first book in the "Bible of Hell" Blake promises on Plate 24 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (see for example Viscomi 280-281). (*The Book of Ahania* and *The Book of Los* are the "second" and "third" books of Urizen respectively.)

Fixity and Fluidity in *The Book of Urizen*

As I had suggested above in my discussion of ideal and real books, textuality and variation play a considerable role in how we read; meaning is not transcendent of materiality but deeply informed by it. Perhaps for no other "book" is this more true than for *The Book of Urizen*. Thus I must caution immediately that I focus on limited examples, and I muster those examples to explore only a limited perspective on the book. There are many, many more which could be pursued. Further, I will not attend to every illustration, nor can I possibly account for every variation in the extant copies. I quote primarily from the version of *Urizen* collected in Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of*

William Blake, except where recourse to other versions opens up further possibilities to consider reading, writing and books as symbols and as activities. The plate order printed by Erdman is not one we can confirm that Blake ever devised; thus the arrangement is entirely editorial. (One editor calls it "'ideal'" (Worrall, *The Urizen Books* 148).) A particularly productive aspect of the plate order Erdman gives is the inclusion of Plate 4, a plate otherwise absent from 5 of the 8 known variants (present in A, B, and C). By productive, I mean that it makes possible a great deal of critical exploration and insight because so much crystallizes on the one page. In, or on, this plate, Urizen (likely) seems to deliver the only direct speech to appear in the poem. It begins, "From the depths of dark solitude . . . I have sought for a joy without pain" (Plate 4, lines 6-10; Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 186). It is this joy without pain which exemplifies, for most readers, that characteristic so fundamental to Urizen: the denial of contraries and a desire for singularity. To complicate matters, though, Blake has not given quotation marks to signal when the speech (if that is what it is) begins, though many editors add quotation marks for what they call clarity (for example, Dover Publication's 1997 *The Book of Urizen*–the facsimile does not include Plate 4, yet the "printed text" version does, though "with some normalization of Blake's spelling, punctuation, and capitalization" (Publisher's Note)).

As to why Blake removed this plate from some versions of the book, I can only speculate. Most striking to me is the convergence between the narrative of the book–the separation of Urizen from the Eternals (or the "falling" of Urizen)–and the dropping of the plate in which Urizen is most firmly constituted as an active agent, actually speaking on his own behalf. Does Blake make Urizen "fall" from his own book? Personally

disturbing is the fact that the only page to have come loose and fall from my own copy of Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* is the page on which Plate 4 appears. Do we "explain" this by saying that of course *that* page would fall out since I turn to it so often? Did Blake make Plate 4 fall because he returned to it so often?

Viscomi asserts that while the exclusion of some plates from some versions might be arbitrary, the exclusion of Plate 4 (and Plate 16, a full illustration) was "systematic and thus meaningful" (283). Viscomi contends that in Plate 4 "Urizen speaks," and he (Viscomi) shows how Plate 16 in Copy A depicts Urizen in fire, a symbolic equation which would "prevent fire from functioning consistently and clearly as a visual symbol of true as opposed to false creation" (283-284). So, as Viscomi's argument goes, Blake drops the plates to maintain consistency. All of this only follows, of course, from a general readerly approach which presumes to uncover some pre-existing consistency and clarity, two characteristics I would not assign to Blake at all, and which assumes that only that which is systematic is meaningful. As I have tried to show, this approach pervades Blake criticism right down to the editorial, textual-note, level.

Take Plate 14, for example (Figure 2-5). Worrall, working from Copy D, asserts that the figures represented are "Eternals" (41). But the rightmost figure, to which a "blue wash" has been applied, looks very much like the figure identified elsewhere as Urizen. The long white beard and the blue tint are highly reminiscent of the figure in Plate 20 whose identity is hard to determine. Is it Urizen because of the beard? Does it coincide with Chapter V, "Urizen deadly black, [not blue] in his chains bound"; though is Urizen in chains, or is he the object being observed by Los, 10 lines above, who "endur'd

his chains" (Plate 13)? Now chains themselves become a complicating, not a clarifying factor. Appeals to consistency, especially to explain authorial intention, simply do not stand up. If anything, what Blake forces us to consider are the implications of the "Urizenic nature of [Los's] activities," as Paul Mann writes, and, further, that characters "intergenerate" one another, as Tilottama Rajan writes (54; 259). In light of these complications, the argument that Urizen would appear too "heroic" if his speech were left intact, as Viscomi contends, does not ring true to me, especially because of the fluid nature of every character throughout the poem. Further, I discuss below the problems of labelling a character "too" anything, in that such a relative estimation depends on our comparing the agent of a local action to some larger construct which we must call "the true character," but which is no more true than the ideal Copy D of the book itself. Consider then with Plate 4 (also referred to as 4a in some numbering schemes) removed (to make Urizen less heroic, as Viscomi argues) the narrative moves from "Shrill the trumpet: & myriads of Eter / -nity" on Plate 3 to "In living creations appear'd / In the flames of eternal fury" (lines 44-45 to Plate 4, lines 1-2, Copy D). Up to this point in the narrative, Urizen has been trying to survive his expulsion (or withdrawal, depending on whose perspective we believe) from Eternity by organizing, building and creating. With Plate 4/4a excised, the Eternals arrive and chase Urizen into the "deserts and rocks" (20) with their flames of fury. They drive him to "howlings & pangs & fierce madness . . . Till hoary, and age-broke, and aged. / In despair and the shadows of death." (24-27).

Especially if we recall that this book *of* Urizen could be as much by him as about him (just as Genesis is said to be by Moses, not about him), then I think we must consider

how easy it might be to see Urizen as deserving of our sympathy. After all, the Eternals appear to have just chased him into seclusion for no reason. It is the Eternals (assumed to represent "true creation" because associated with fire?) who are jealous, vindictive, and arbitrary with their anger. At least with Plate 4/4a intact, we get a chance to see Urizen proclaim his laws in books of metal, and as such are given some reason to explain the Eternals' reaction to him. I would argue that with Plate 4/4a excised, Urizen becomes a much *more* sympathetic character. Thus Viscomi's argument that Plate 4/4a makes Urizen too heroic does not take into account that other perspectives might be possible. It depends very heavily on closing interpretive possibilities which complicate our sense of perspective–that is, who we believe could be telling the story, and thus our sense of how characters represent good or evil forces. Mitchell certainly understates the case: "the identification of figures is often problematic" (*Blake's Composite Art* 109). Note the further irony that with Plate 4/4a excised, it is the Eternals who appear with the shrill trumpet blast. But with Plate 4/4a in place, it is the seven deadly sins of the soul, *born of Urizen himself*, who appear. And Plate 4/4a makes Urizen too heroic?

Much of this is to suggest the tension between fixity and fluidity (in materiality, in interpretation) that pervades a book like *Urizen*. Of course, in studying that tension, I cannot remove myself from it. As such, admittedly, I commit some of the editorial faults that Blake's texts so clearly work against, for to proceed, I do need to fix a few things in place. For example, I name the bearded figure pictured throughout the book as Urizen where it seems productive to do so, even though the text does not necessarily make such a direct assertion. In some ways, naming of this sort is a convenience which identifies the

activities going on in the text with those being performed (or whose consequences appear) in the illustration. To speak of "Urizen" then is often to speak of a set of activities or desires occurring in a specific context, more than it is necessarily to speak of a unified, stable character that is posited to exist outside, even to transcend, the text. (Thus there is no "too" heroic.) As those sets of activities and desires vary from context to context we are forced to think of "Urizens" even while we write of "Urizen." To speak of a "Urizen" (or of any other character) as existing somehow outside of the activities presented in Blake's texts is to suggest an "ideal" against which we are forced to measure every instance of "his" "appearance," by which I mean the appearance of U-R-I-Z-E-N as a collection of marks on the page. It seems we will always be confounded then by individual contexts which do not conform neatly to the posited ideal, in which case we are left to say that Urizen is an inconsistent character, is acting "out" of character, or worse, that Blake is inconsistent in his characterization. What seems more productive, however, is to consider character only as individual contexts of activities and desires grouped under a common name. Thus contradictions are not deviations from some ideal, but rather they constitute the character itself. (I would argue that this more closely approximates real people, who are themselves often a series of contradicting desires and activities.)

I am choosing to move fundamentally away from the assumption, implicit in systematic critical projects like those of Frye and Damon, that there is some mythic field which constitutes, grounds and guarantees the coherence of narrative and character (and thus writing and reading), or against which we can gauge the consistency of any action.

Since I entertain the likelihood that characters do not *act* so much as action defines one parameter among the larger set of some nameable agency, I am choosing to follow Ault's description of characters as "complexes of relationships, with no real interiors" (*Four Zoas* 280). His description is specific in this case to the Lamb of God and Satan in Night VIII of *The Four Zoas*; however, I see no reason why the description cannot be more generally applied. Ault's attention to "perspective ontology" may, in fact, be another way of framing "character" as a category constituted by, not proof of, agency at a given moment (280).

My purpose is to concentrate on *The Book of Urizen* as a text in which the tension between fixity and fluidity crystallizes in a most profound way. Blake, as I tried to show in the "Introduction" to *The Songs of Innocence*, is in no sense interested in evading or transcending the material nature of artistic production in his poetry, despite his concern for the limitations of materiality, or for avoiding the issue of having to fix his artistic vision to what may appear the immobile and immobilizing page. As Paul Mann writes, *The Book of Urizen* is "a book about books" (49). It is a "system of enclosures" (52). More than this, *Urizen* is a book about the impossibility of getting *outside* of the book one is writing.

Blake complicates the usual prophetic *outside* of some transcendent authority through and from whom the poet receives dictation. In the Preludium to *The Book of Urizen*, the writing "I," hears the call of the Eternals gladly, and invites them to "dictate" words and "unfold" visions. This is, presumably, a kind of invocation to the muses, after which the writer receives what become the text and illustration we have before us. But,

as Mitchell contends, the "distinction [between Urizen and the Eternals] is not reducible

to absolute good versus absolute evil," and thus our Eternal guarantors of "true"

revelation are dubious (116). What does it mean, though, for the reader, when

complications themselves unfold over the course of the book. Do we "believe" the

Eternals' vision? Do we side with them, and for how long?

The persistence with which Blake complicates the book (in terms of character,

narrative, text and illustration) speaks perhaps to his belief in our need to be complicated

out of believing the Eternals' vision as, by default, good, and any opposition to them as

bad. For example, what are we to make of the Eternals who weave a "woof" and call it

"Science" (Plate 19:9), or who "erect the tent" (Plate 19: 18) which separates them from

Los (whom they had commandeered into watching and confining Urizen to keep *him*

separate) (Plate 5:35-40)? Consider that Urizen creates the "Net of Religion" (Plate 25:

21). How do we align ourselves with or against one but not the other of these characters

given their similar actions?

Consider further the perversity of Blake moving the Preludium in Copy E from

the front of the poem (where we are tempted immediately to believe the Eternals as an

extra-textual authority) to a place between Plates 5 and 6. Where we would have "For

Eternity stood wide apart, / As the stars are apart from the earth" (Plates 5-6:40-1), we are

given "For Eternity stood wide apart," full page illustration of a floating, Urizenic figure,

then "PRELUDIUM / TO / THE FIRST BOOK OF URIZEN" (Copy E, Plates 5, 12, 2,

following numbering system used by Bentley, Erdman, and Keynes). In Copy E, it is not

until Eternity is already "wide apart" that the writerly "I" calls for them to dictate words

and unfold visions. In fact, Blake moves the Preludium wide apart from where it should sit as prelude to the poem, as though moving the textual block were tantamount to moving meaning. In Copy E we are forced with the possibility that something like the "Eternals" are no more than E-t-e-r-n-a-l-s marked onto a page, and thus no more outside of those marks than meaning is outside the materiality of the book. What does this separation, material and thematic, say about the legitimacy of the Eternals as epic narrators (dictators?)? Mitchell writes that Blake forces us to confront "the potential egotism and megalomania of the prophetic, bardic role" (112). Following from this, it becomes almost impossible to fix meaning. Yet we have before us a seemingly fixed book. The more we interrogate that fixity though, the more fluid things become, and we are confronted with a text that has forced a very different kind of reading strategy than the kinds of books suggested by the Urizenic books of law and measurement, themselves clearly reflective of the Newtonian text Blake wanted to work against.

Blake does look to generate new kinds of poetic spaces and experiences by way of showing the hollowness of some of the assumptions behind "Newtonian" reading strategies which look to fix and stabilize meaning under authorial guardianship (as I discussed in Chapter 1). In "Incommensurability and Interconnection in Blake's Anti-Newtonian Text," Donald Ault writes that "Newton was arguing for a single unified proto-philosophy and religion" (150). And that "One of Blake's central purposes in constructing anti-Newtonian narrative was to create in his readers an experience of the bankruptcy of the kinds of assumptions about the interconnections in knowledge, perception, and reality in the doctrine of the prisca sapentia" (141). The abstract,

universalizing nature of the laws which Urizen writes in his books of metal in *The Book of Urizen*, and the clear association between Urizen and Newton, suggests that, for Blake, there was a deep connection between the systemic nature of Newtonianism (as a cultural phenomenon) and the act of writing which ensured that system's cultural centrality. Urizen writes, not just in "books formd of metals" (Plate 4, 24) but in "the Book / Of eternal brass" (Plate 4, 33). Here he creates

> One command, one joy, one desire,
> One curse, one weight, one measure
> One King, one God, one Law. (Plate 4:38-40)

That the book is eternal is crucial, in that it represents the very fixity, which Urizen assumes for his universalizing system, against which Blake will posit the fluidity of his own poetic work, even as that work participates in fixities of its own.

We see abstraction as a form of control in Urizen as he explores his surroundings in *The Book of Urizen*: "He form'd a line & a plummet / To divide the Abyss beneath." Urizen forms "scales to weigh . . . massy weights . . . a brazen quadrant . . . [and] golden compasses" (Plate 22: 32-40). Critically, as I had mentioned in Chapter 1, Urizen forms the weights and measures *before* exploring his surroundings. Thus what he finds will be circumscribed by the abstract, standardized weights and measures. Stuart Peterfreund writes, "In the pursuit of a rational, universal, materialist understanding of reality, prescriptive thought attempts to deny the emotional, personal, and spiritual dimension of understanding through a strategy of marginalization and repression" (38). Compare this with an editor providing a "Preface" of some kind to *The Book of Urizen* in which we are told who is or is not speaking, what certain characters represent, what symbols mean, and

what this book's relationship to other books is. This provides the reader with the limited language of what he or she can discover, before making those (or what might have been other) imaginative discoveries unaided. Blake is aware that the potential for discovery (or, indeed, change, creativity or imagination) is repressed by a system that has, by its nature, named that which it has not yet found.

Tension in *The Book of Urizen*

The Book of Urizen reveals much about Blake's involvement with the tension between fixity and fluidity. I remember at one point being able to discuss things like "narrative" in Blake without complication. And while I offer what amounts to such a discussion here, the process of it coming into being (put another way: how I have re-learned to read by reading Blake) has given rise to the numerous discussions which surround it, including those on editors, characters, text-illustration relationship, and textual variation. My reading of *The Book of Urizen* has, unalterably, become a character in that narrative. My reading is an agent which shapes the text, which influences characters, and which is, in turn, (re)generated by the meaning it generates. So I discuss fixity and fluidity in terms of how they play out in the narrative of *Urizen*, but that very discussion participates deeply in the fixity-fluidity tension itself, for I am constantly trying to come to grips with the page as a set of marks fixed in place, yet the fluidity with which meaning can move, and, indeed, with which those very pages can sometimes move (have been moved), to reveal an entirely different fixity than the one I had first thought existed. *The Book of Urizen* has become its own horizon, limiting the stability with which arguments about it can be made so irrevocably involving the practice of reading

within it. To discuss narrative, for example, is always to have to discuss something else, some other version or other possibility. Or it is simply to leave that something else out.

The word Urizen is usually assumed to suggest horizon, your reason, or, as Harold Bloom suggests, to invoke the Greek *ourizein* (Erdman 906). However the last word of the first line of Chap: I offers an interesting variation of Urizen in "risen," describing the shadow of horror in Eternity. In that the reader of the book has just turned the page to read, "Lo, a shadow of horror is risen," what if "you" have just risen into the book? What if Urizen is also you-risen? Certainly the figure striding across the top of Plate 3 looks "into" the page, just as the reader does. And I have risen in the book to limit and to define and to argue and to fix things in place as horrible and as Self-clos'd as any other character. "What Demon / Hath form'd this abominable void . . . ?" I hear the text say to me: It is you-risen.

But fixity is neither always good, nor always bad. It is a necessity of making vision accessible in the material world. Conversely, fluidity is neither always good, nor always bad, but is revealed in books like *Urizen* (and *Ahania*, for example) as a problematic state of non-entity and thus non-activity from which the poet might generate vision, but beyond which the poet must take that vision and fix it to the material page, lest it remain unprolific, and unorganized (adjectives which recur throughout Blake's work). Urizen, in order to be an active agent, becomes, or is given, a solid body. He is formed by a process of contraction and limitation, terms normally carrying negative baggage in Blake. But without contraction and limitation, Urizen is left "unprolific," "unknown," "unorganiz'd," "disorganiz'd" (70-81). Thus, he is incapable of being and doing, until his

limitation. And as Urizen is organized into a solid body, so does Los himself take shape. As Paul Mann writes, Blake "mirrors himself in both Urizen and Los" (56). Suggestively, as Blake creates his book of Urizen, the bounds of his own imaginative vision (or the impossibility of the book becoming something else), as it is fixed to the page, are thrown into greater and greater relief. Truly then Los becomes loss–a figure paradoxically composed by the agency to remember what he had been as part of Eternity–just as Blake's vision loses part of itself, the parts that never become, to become material.

Blake clearly implicates himself in the same organizing practices that Urizen undertakes by having Urizen create "books formd of metals" to keep his codes and laws (24). Figure 2-6 shows Urizen with his books (Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake*, 187); notably, Urizen writes (or illustrates) with both hands, perhaps to suggest the mirror writing Blake had to practice in order that words engraved on a copper plate would, when pressed, face the correct direction on the page. It is also possible that in one hand Urizen hold a writing instrument and in the other an illustrating instrument. As he opens his book up and reads and writes it, we are reminded that we are also reading a book open before us. Curiously, Urizen's foot seems to be reading the text upon which he sits while his hands write. The text he "reads" here is very similar to the one Urizen opens for us on Plate 5. Do we thus discover later in the poem that Urizen is creating the same book over again, taking dictation from himself; or is this a different Urizen, or not him at all, or different books entirely?

The reader is also implicated in the symbolic system of books, reading and writing. Beyond the possibility that the reader is a "you" risen in the text, there is further evidence, arising from Blake's use of line breaks, suggesting the implication of Urizen, Blake and the reader in the system of reading and writing.

Specifically, while Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* prints line 24, Plate 4 of *The Book of Urizen* as, "Here alone I in books formd of metals," then a line break, and then "Have written the secrets of wisdom," Erdman's *The Illuminated Blake* reprints the original text's lines and line breaks:

> Here alone I in books formd of me-
> tals
> Have written the secrets of wisdom

It is possible to argue that Blake simply ran out of room in the column of his page as he engraved, and therefore had to break the line at "books formd of me-." Or, he broke the line to preserve the (notably ragged) heptameter lines he'd been working in. Elsewhere in *Urizen*, Blake does break words across the line without leaving any obvious residual semantic meaning. The meaning may reside as much in Blake's ability to implicate the reader in books, writing and reading, as in the immediate semantic sense of the text at hand.

For example, on Plate 23, copy B, at lines 6 and 7, Erdman prints "portions of life . . . Of a foot, or a hand, or a head / Or a heart, or an eye, they swam mischevous" (*Complete Poetry and Prose*). Blake actually breaks the line as "Or a heart, or an eye, they swam mis / -chevous," leaving "mis" and "-chevous," two otherwise nonsense words (*Illuminated Blake* 205). (At least "me-tals" leaves us with "me.") It is possible to say

that mis and chevous are "swimming" like the portions of life they describe, but I'd also suggest that it is Blake's treatment of words–his breaking them apart–that is just as revealing as the meaning of the parts left over. Breaking the word reveals the word as something more than a semantic construction. In a line break which renders mischevous as mis / -chevous, we are forced to confront the mere textuality of words, that is, a word as a collections of lines, movements of the pen, no different in some respects than any of the other graphic marks that adorn Blake's page.

That Blake might have considered words as collections of lines and curves, just as much as they were meaningful semantic wholes, is certainly suggested in the line which contains just "-chevous." For Blake has filled in the otherwise blank space with a characteristic vine of interlinear foliage, suggesting the ease with which Blake moved from "text" to "design" as though he did not want the distinctions between those categories to operate as forcefully as they might have. At least there is the suggestion that the word and the vine share some common graphicality, one neither more nor less important than the other as marks on the page–at least not until the reader arrives, rising, to the text. This particular tendril runs from the page's far-left edge (as we look at it), right through "-chevous," (if we choose to differentiate the two) into a central vine stock which sends tendrils throughout the rest of the text and which descends to mirror ("mock," suggests Erdman) the head and shoulders of Urizen pictured below (*Illuminated Blake* 205).

However, at the same time that the broken word can draw our attention to the word as a collection of letters and letters as a collection of marks on the page, we must

confront our ability to make meaning *despite* the breakage. What does this force us to confront about reading as an activity? Even if the linguistic is made to appear as the graphic, how do we, as readers, find our way back to the linguistic? Despite having to confront a broken textuality, the fact that we can still make sense, even of a fractured word, perhaps goes to show how stable semantic status really is, regardless of textual fragility. That is, we can still understand a word's meaning even when it is broken apart. (What define the limits of our ability to read broken words or various handwritings, for example?) Put a different way, by virtue of our ability to continue reading-by-fixing a broken word, and not having to discard the fragments entirely, we are made aware of some habit of reading by which we compare actual textual marks to an ideal whose semantic sense those marks are to invoke. From some vocabulary, we choose the ideal word that is most closely represented by the actual textual version we have encountered. This ability allows us to read a word written in a variety of different handwriting styles, but to arrive at the same meaning from each of those instances. Thus we clearly have some recourse to an authoritative mental catalogue, or "interpretive community" as Stanley Fish has suggested, which guarantees, or at least governs, semantic consistency even in the face of variant textuality. In being able to read through a broken line, especially in the context of a book about books, we are made to confront the deep penetration of semantic standardization which authorizes meaning, and which enables reading at all, by overriding textual inconsistency.

To this end, we are faced with the fact that textuality *is* transparent to some degree. If it were not, then a broken word, like a broken window, would not allow us to

see through it to its meaning. The transparency (supposed or otherwise) of textual

materiality is of central concern to the Santa Cruz Blake Study Group in their "What Type

of Blake?" "We are constantly influenced in our reading," they assert, "by *how a poem*

looks on the page" (309). I certainly agree with their argument, and with their claim that

"Editors of Blake should be much more imaginative and insistent in their attempts" to

capture the typographic elements of Blake's page (311). That we can make it past "the

look of the poem on the page," even when the units of that poem are fractured, does, I

think, mitigate the degree of influence that look has on us though. As I have argued

above, we are at least forced (perhaps) to consider how we manage meaning and

textuality in understanding a broken word, even if that breaking does not radically alter

how we think of the page in general. Mis / -chevous, for example, both calls our attention

to the "material substance" of words as graphic marks on a page, yet speaks at the same

time to our ability to gain access (or have recourse to) some non-material semantic sense.

Thus reading is always to "fix" (a term with implications for "fixity") a text to some

degree whereby we fit variation into the ideal it most closely approximates. Typesetting

does most of this job for us by regularizing almost all aspects of print. Our ability to

manage, or fix, variation does suggest the degree to which materiality is "invisible" or

"transparent," however much the Santa Cruz Blake Study Group claims it is not (316-

317). Again though, I would agree with their general claim that editors of Blake do not

need to make type *more* transparent by processes of so-called normalization.

In the case of the me-tals break, however, it seems likely that Blake did see the line break coming and deliberately chose to break metal into me-tals, such that we are left with the wonderfully chilling line:

Here alone I in books formd of me . . .

Since there was so much room left in the line following this one, Blake could have broken it at any number of different points. Certainly he could have left me-tals intact and moved it to the next line if he had wanted.

Whatever Blake's intention, and whatever contingencies might have influenced the breaking of the line, however, it helps me to think through some of the complexity of Urizenic books and writing by considering what a "book formd of me" and a "book formd of metal" really are. It seems that for all that Urizen wants to believe that his books are abstract law, or mere empirical measurement of an existing space which he has had no hand in creating, and that his books are fixed by, not just on, the metal of their creation–they are, ultimately, *of him*: "formd of me." They are his perspective, his measurement, and his laws which are universal only because they have been abstracted beyond their individualized origins. And certainly we must hear Blake's voice claiming the "me" of his own "me-tal" books, and perhaps our own "me" as we read the book open before us. Indeed, how much of the "other's" text, is always really of us?

Conclusion

The volume of collected essays edited by Nelson Hilton and Thomas Vogler, *Unnam'd Forms*, explores the possibility that "the 'meaning' of a text is something derived from a technique of reading" (1). And Tillotama Rajan's study of the

hermeneutics of reading, *The Supplement of Reading*, explores the role of reading as a practice shaped by the text itself, a text which asks us to "consider not simply the structure of signs but also the life of signs in literary communities and in psychic life" (11).

The Book of Urizen is an exploration of Blake's own situation as an artist in a Newtonian world. He must balance the forces of fixity and fluidity as they come into play in his work. He must, as suggested in the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*, enter into the fluid world of the child-as-creative impulse, yet transmit his vision such that it can be apprehended by the five limited senses, for that is what the world is equipped with. The necessity of the fixed plate can never be abandoned, only disrupted by practical moves like reordering pages or colouring works differently; or by theoretical moves which require us as readers to engage the poetry in a dialogue which immediately removes the text from the fixed page into the fluid realm of interpretive possibility.

In later chapters I advance the hypothesis that Blake's marginalia, his annotations to other writers' work, form and inform the deep tension between fixity and fluidity I have developed as part of some of Blake's other work. My study of the marginalia considers issues of centres and peripheries, authority and the page, and reading and writing.

What does it mean to change the finished page? What does the look of marginalia do? How are marginalia related to the composite-ness of Blake's art, to his anti-Newtonian project? And what issues do they force in terms of our academic use of

Blake, the role of quotation and authority in academic productions, and the assumptions

which authorize one voice on the finished page?

Notes

1. Despite invoking authors like Frye and Damon as negative examples in this case, I am willing to entertain that *without* such seminal work, Blake studies might not be as central in the academy as it is today. Frye later writes of Blake's prophecies, "They may need interpretation, but not deciphering: there can be no 'key' and no open-sesame formula and no patented system of translation" (7).

2. Ault relates the story of having to conform to editorial policy in writing this article. Where he had wanted to print "LONDON" in all capitals to retain Blake's rendering of it (and thus to highlight potential connections between the look of the word LONDON and London's "charter'd streets"), he was forced to write, for example, "(the all capitalized) 'Lon' and 'don'" (Ault 136). Such is the persistent reality of making books.
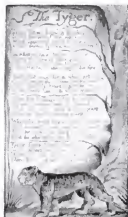
Figure 2-1 Blake's "Tyger" (Bindman 84; Copy W)

Figure 2-2 *Innocence* frontispiece (Bindman 44; Copy W)

Figure 2-3 *Experience* frontispiece (Bindman 70; Copy W)

Figure 2-4 *Innocence* title page (Bindman 45; Copy W)

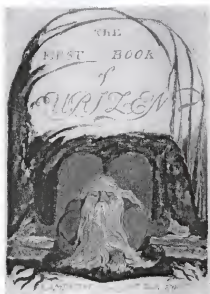Figure 2-5 the Eternals(?) in *Urizen* (plate 15 in Bindman, Copy D, 45)

Figure 2-6 *The First Book of Urizen* (title page, Copy D, Bindman 203)

. . . it is quite safe to use these quotations here.
- Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (15)

*William Blake is unrestrained on this point: 'The Foundation
of Empire,' he says in his annotations to Reynold's Discourses, 'is Art and Science.
Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is No More. Empire follows Art and not
vice versa as Englishmen suppose.'*
- Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (12)

Introduction

Up to this point, I have tried to lay some contextual grounds in which I want to

consider Blake's marginalia. Often without much coaxing, difficult issues of textuality,

meaning and authority emerged and shook the very "ground" upon which the scholarship

I was, and am, trying to practice stands. Issues of quotation (and thus authority) and

intention become, at times, paralysing; consider the problem of quotation in the case of a

canonical work like *The Book of Urizen*, in which attempts to extract parts for quotation

(and then to assign a speaker: be it Blake, Urizen, or narrator) are always confounded by

the embeddedness of parts within other parts, the iterative (re)constitution of those parts

as the reader engages them, and what often emerges as the incommensurability of parts

taken to form a whole. However, it is these very issues that Blake's so-called canonical

works tend to force, however impassable they sometimes seem, that I would like to

consider in this and later chapters in terms specifically of his marginalia. Chapter 3

attends to issues surrounding the usage of Blake's marginalia in certain instances of Blake scholarship, while Chapters 4 and 5 explore the primary sources themselves: the actual books Blake owned and annotated, which I have been able to consult in various rare book collections.

There will be times, in fact a majority of them, when I will be less interested by *what* Blake writes in the margins than by the fact that he writes there at all, and what implications such writing has in terms of textuality, contextuality, authority and meaning. It is this attention to the materiality of the marginalia which I hope sets my work apart from most other Blake scholarship that deals with the marginalia. Ultimately, to (re)mark the finished page unsettles a certain kind of reading strategy which looks "through" language to meaning. The Santa Cruz Blake Study Group's transparency metaphor is again useful ("What Type of Blake?"). To mark the finished page–to smudge the window to meaning with a nose-print maybe–is to remind that language is not a transparent, and certainly not an inactive medium, through which the reader can pass to some transcendent and controlling meaning which operates above/beyond a human rhetorical position, though which is implicitly controlled (and guaranteed) by the author as in the Newtonian text. But even Newton sat somewhere, holding a pen, touching paper, laying out his system of the world, believing in certain things, not believing in other things, finally constituted by a certain social and political time and space. As Stuart Peterfreund reminds us, any "critical argument [in literature or science] speaks to the issues raised by another argument . . . the critical argument in question proceeds from a rhetorical position no less well defined and interested than that of the argument it seeks to overturn" (20).

Specifically, in regards to the "General Scholium" to Newton's *Principia*, Peterfreund points us to "its refusal to acknowledge its status as argument–with the corollary refusal to acknowledge that what is being said, or argued for, must be reflexive to the interested position of the person mounting the discussion" (20). What more devastating to "absolute" language, i.e. that which pretends to transcend its own interested position, its own materiality, than the introduction of new *marks* onto the page? To read the marginalia for content alone, as many scholars currently are doing, is to reassert the transparency of language on the printed page; certainly to argue that marginalia are just parochial, idiosyncratic notes-to-self, and that they get in the way is to reify the original finished page as the cleansed window through which we gain access to meaning.

In this and subsequent chapters, I challenge some of the fundamental concepts of Blake criticism by showing how Blake's marginalia are a crucial dimension of his anti-Newtonian project. I also explore how the marginalia work in ways that are similar to–yet extend–Blake's composite art. The marginalia disrupt the fixity of the printed page by introducing disorder as fluidity: energy set against the single perspective (what Blake called "Single vision") and the suppression of individuality Blake saw at work in the Newtonian system. The act of creating marginalia represents the material marking of multiple, often self-interfering perspectives onto what seems, in certain instances, as the otherwise univocal page. As illustration and text work to decentre one another in Blake's composite art, so do his marginalia work to decentre the text of another author. Issues fundamental to Blake scholarship, including those of textuality, contextuality, authority and meaning are forced very much to the foreground in my study of the marginalia.

Traditional Blake scholarship has tended to extract quotation from the marginalia just as it would from any other of Blake's works. As above, for example, Frye asserts the safety of quoting marginal material, and Said confidently quotes Blake's annotations to another's work without considering that Blake himself warns, in one of his first notes in Reynolds' *Discourses*, that "the Reader must expect to Read in all my Remarks on these Books Nothing but Indignation and Resentment." What Blake writes in the margins might be what he actually believes, what he actually believes as a result of reading Reynolds, or a knee-jerk response to whatever Reynolds says. Said asserts that Blake "is unrestrained" on the matter of Empire and art; however, by Blake's own admission, the context of what he writes is highly restrictive (and the space of the margin itself is *materially* restrictive), if we believe that what he offers will always be, regardless of other factors, indignation and resentment. Frye's reassurance that quotation is "safe" stands, ironically enough, as perhaps the best warning that it is not.

Why Marginalia?

I have chosen to study Blake's marginalia partly because they receive relatively little critical attention. McGann goes so far as to assert that Blake's marginalia, unlike the intellectual prose of Coleridge or Shelley, "[do] not command our interest or study" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 16). (Curiously, McGann quotes liberally from Blake's marginalia, though he does so from Erdman's 1982 *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*.) As I explore below, when the marginalia do receive critical attention, I think it is often somewhat myopic, tending to ignore issues of textuality which are so crucial in favour of content. I have tried to indicate the effects that editorial decision

making–or the anthological imperative–have on how we come to a text, in order to throw into greater relief the degree to which certain approaches to Blake's marginalia depend on typeset editions (themselves systems) to present arguments for systematicity in Blake.

Further, it is in the marginalia that we have an example of Blake trying to enter into dialogue in a medium which so thoroughly prohibits dialogue. Thus we can see how Blake reacts to the book (or page) as it often functions for a figure like Urizen, for example, who is not interested in any perspective but his own (in many cases he actively tries to suppress multiplicity) and therefore prescribes perspective for everyone else in his books of eternal metal. By extension, I see the act of creating marginalia, of marking and remarking, as deeply embedded in the larger anti-Newtonian poetics at work throughout Blake's art. (I address this specifically in Chapter 4 in terms of intersections between Blake's annotations to Reynolds, and *The Four Zoas*, for example.) In this sense, the marginalia are hardly marginal at all; on the contrary, they constitute an important example–one of many–of the anti-system aspect in Blake's work. This does not, however, suggest to me that they are necessarily "safe" to quote, as though they can reveal "Blake" more immediately than his other work.

Paul Valéry, writing about the marginalia of Edgar Allan Poe, asserts that "marginal notes represent part of the notations of pure thought" (177; Volume VIII). I want to avoid privileging marginalia in this sense, as some form of writing closer to "thought" or "truth" or "purity" than any other. Hopefully my discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 regarding the problems of thought– pure and complete–being able to precede writing (and thus of language being a mere conduit, not a creator, of meaning) disabuse

the notion that Blake's marginalia represent the expression, in most rarified form, of his "true thoughts." On the contrary, it is the marginalia's deep sensitivity to context, perhaps even their assertion of contexts as inescapable (for there can be no absolute space of language or argument), that leads me to assert their centrality. It also leads to fundamental problems of scholarship. The more one tries to mount a systematic argument, the more one is likely to find that significant details do not fit the paradigm, must be ignored or deemed "unintentional," and begin to pile up in quantities approaching the pile of details which *do* fit the paradigm. Donald Ault asserts that his *Narrative Unbound* is meant to be "fundamentally incommensurable" with "the existing body of Blake scholarship" in that it develops a process of interpretation "that requires constant retroactive reconstitution of 'facts' or reader 'events'" (xi). Such an interpretive strategy implicitly asserts (the very Blakean) critique against systems which cannot allow themselves to reconsider individual contexts, "facts" or "events." Crucial then, for the current project, is to warn that I am not mounting an analysis of Blake's "philosophy" or his "theory" by reading the marginalia. My work is to be incommensurable with that kind of approach, for it looks rather at individual moments throughout the marginalia less to determine what Blake thinks and more to consider how he treats the page as a site where authority, Newtonian narrative, and traditional reading strategies might be disrupted.

Marginalia in Blake Scholarship

As I had noted above, the marginalia are often treated just as any other published document Blake produced. That is, quotations are taken from the marginalia, just as they

might be taken from, say, *Jerusalem* (though quotations from both sources are often treated with equally little sensitivity for context). In a recent article, "'To Defend the Bible in This Year 1798 Would Cost a Man His Life'," Morton D. Paley explicates Blake's marginalia to Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* without any theorizing as to what the act of annotation might mean, especially within the context of the importance Blake places on books and writing throughout his other work. The attention that Paley does pay to form versus content here is not connected to any other parts of Blake's artistic work. For example, Paley writes, "Blake carefully links his marginal note to three words of text"; Paley extends his argument to suggest Blake's "position" on religion and antinomianism in 1798, based on what Blake has written in the margins (sidenote 3, 36). Paley never considers Blake's "linking" as important in anything but the non-graphic, non-textual, sense. In Paley's analysis, the materiality of the page has indeed disappeared, in that he attaches no importance to the *act* of marking. As I argue in Chapters 4 and 5, to group words (or printed lines) in ways other than those seemingly authorized by the formal arrangement of the original text is in many ways to disrupt, at a very basic level, the way in which texts try to control themselves, by limiting certain kinds of interpretive options, or at least by making some options less available than others. For Blake to group lines with a marginal bracket, and then to annotate those lines, reveals a text in new ways, thus revealing the degree to which the creation of meaning is deeply tied to textuality (for example, how ideas are arranged in, and also *by*, paragraphs).

The literal linking, the line which Blake draws on the page, stands, in Paley's argument, only for the intellectual link Blake is making between his commentary and

Watson's work, but, in Paley's argument, it has no force in and of itself as a textual mark, even though it is one that disrupts the original's very form. Again, I think, the questions that arise are important. What does it mean for Blake to impose his own mark onto the supposedly finished page of another author? What issues of authority and textuality does this force? How does this kind of marking intersect with other instances of marking in Blake's other work? (There is no shortage of examples of this last.)

Similar to Paley, Donald John, in "Blake and Forgiveness," pays little or no attention to the materiality of Blake's annotations, favouring rather an imagined philosophic theory, a systematic whole, to which Blake's marginal comments give us access. Indeed, John arrives at a summary of Blake's "complex of ideas" regarding God and forgiveness based on Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (74). For his text, John uses Erdman's 1982 *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. As I addressed in Chapter 2, the problems of a non-facsimile version in this case are many and immediate (Paley consulted the original for his work). It is no wonder John is able to ignore issues of textuality: Erdman's typeset edition cannot possibly reproduce the kinds of materiality we are forced to confront in the originals. As a result, John's argument is purely content-driven; it traces the themes of "the coupling of forgiveness with disclosure" and "the shaping influence of one's perspectives towards God" as those themes are "reveal[ed]" in Blake's annotations to Lavater and "reinforced and refined" in his early reading of Swedenborg (74; 75). Again, it is not so much the argument itself I want to challenge; as John's develops it, with attention to a number of Blake's marginal notes, it is hard to disagree that Blake was influenced by his reading. Methodologically

though, ignoring the original, textual nature of those notations makes it much easier to see a consistent "theory" being expressed by Blake (John explores, for example, "Blake's doctrine of God" (77)).

If one has recourse to a typeset edition, there's no need to consider, for example, the placement of notes on the page, their size in relation to each other (or to the original), whether they are in pencil or ink, what their condition on the page is; or finally, most problematic for an argument like John's, in which Blake is supposed to be expressing ideas "which permeated his work to the very end" (74), whether marginal notations are even legible or not. It seems misleading to argue for a "complex of ideas" that recurs throughout Blake's work, when, in some cases, Blake's "ideas" in the marginalia are expressed by underlining or bracketing certain passages *in the original*; in Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, for example, Blake draws brackets to group 7 lines in section 404 (on page 411), and 5 lines on page 421. In addition, he underlines *portions* within these newly created groupings, *and* he provides a "Note this" (on page 411) and a "Mark this" (on page 421). Is underlining another's work a form of expressing one's *own* ideas? Does the material Blake chooses to mark become part of *his* complex of ideas? And how do we treat words that are bracketed *and* underlined versus those just bracketed, or those just annotated, or indeed those portions of the work Blake did not annotate at all and thus may or may not have read? Especially since John is arguing for the influence of Blake's reading of Swedenborg on his reading of Lavater, it seems fairly crucial to consider how Blake's marking of the text might inform the degree to which we can assert a possible hierarchy of influence. Did those passages that Blake underlined and bracketed

and annotated influence him more than portions of the text he did not touch, or may not have read at all? I'm not suggesting we need an answer to these questions, since I do not think a definitive one is available (or even desirable); however, my point is to raise the issue of textuality an article like John's misses, and how again the regularizing effect of an edition like Erdman's makes certain kinds of patterns emerge less problematically than they might otherwise, while forcing other problems to submerge entirely.

In terms of John's essay, I do not deny the possibility that Blake was influenced by his reading, or that in his annotating we can see the same kinds of thematic ideas emerging as those which appear elsewhere in his work; certainly I advance the latter argument myself to some degree. But I do want to reassert some of the problems with "reading" marginalia just as though the typeset edition reprinted all that was truly important to consider. The regularized version of Blake's annotations makes "complexes of ideas" or Blake's "doctrine[s]" (as John's writes) seem more coherent and continuous than they actually are, since all statements appear equalized on the page. In fact, throughout these chapters, I have been working through the problems involved with asserting anything so systematic and reliable as a "complex" or "doctrine" whose completeness transcends the otherwise fragmentary nature of the details which are asserted to make it up.

One particularly frustrating irony is that Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* in fact *does* attempt to convey the busyness of Blake's annotating by indicating, not just what he has written in the margins and blank spaces, but also what he has underlined or bracketed. However, even this laudable effort does damage to the

materiality of graphic marks. For sections 336 and 404 in Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* Erdman must *write*: "[Marked by a large cross in the right margin]" (referring to section 336), and "[Bracketed as well as underlined]" (referring to section 404). The brackets I quote are Erdman's (607). The danger here is to make the implicit assumption that the graphic mark which is in the shape of a large cross is equivalent to the written phrase "a large cross," and thus to assume that the written description gives transparent access to what is being described, or that the annotation and the description of the annotation have the same material force upon the reader. (To assume, that is, that to *write* that Blake bracketed certain lines has the same effect as actually having to read the drawn bracket and the lines it contains.) Hopefully part of what I have shown in Chapters 1 and 2 is that such easy movement is not possible, and that the textual immediacy lost as texts are stabilized and regularized following editorial (most often economic) principles is an important constituent of meaning.

One particularly grim example of the effects of the editorial-as-economic principle can be seen in the 1876 edition of *Works by William Blake*. The copy I consulted is in the British Library; the work was "Reproduced in facsimile from the original editions." "One Hundred Copies [were] printed for Private Circulation" (no page numbers). The collection, with pages printed in either green or brown monotone, includes *The Songs of Innocence* and *The Songs of Experience*, *The Book of Thel*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America*, *Europe*, *The First Book of Urizen*, and *The Song of Los*. Since the reproductions are done in monotone, the quality is exceptionally poor. Figure 3-1 shows the title page to *The First Book of Urizen* as it is printed in *Works by William Blake*.

Most startling is that the figure does not even seem to have any arms, let alone might his hands be writing on what we can tell from other copies are tablets (also indiscernible in this copy) at his sides. In Chapter 2 I explored the crucial importance that writing played in this book about books. But in the interest of cheap reproduction, this monotone "facsimile" does great disservice to the original. Also lost in the 1876 version are the marks that cover the book upon which the figure's right foot rests.

Further examples of how book production, in this case cheap book production, determines what is made available to readers include the title page to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (Figure 3-2). In the 1876 *Works of William Blake* version, there are no figures visible in the monotone block to the lower right of the title; however, in most copies of the original, figures which appear to be drooped over emerge from the streaks of water colour. The hinted emergence of these figures is important in that Oothoon assumes a similar hunched-over pose in the "frontispiece" (the "frontispiece" occurs at the end of the book in Copy A), although her arms do not hang down; they are bound behind her and locked up with Bromion's. Erdman notes that the other emergent figure on the title page "is a variant of Theotormon in Plates i and 4" (*Illuminated Blake* 126). In Copy O of *Visions of the Daughter of Albion* Blake has achieved a striking level of control over his colouring and printing processes. He's used gold to highlight his designs and ink to delineate features more so than is evident in earlier printings. The detail evident in Oothoon's face in the "frontispiece" varies greatly between copies O and A for example. In O her eyes are clearly open, though in all other copies they appear closed. Blake's ability to control how each of the editions he produced looked is striking; the

1876 *Works of William Blake* shows the results when artistic production is governed by economic concerns. It is of course too much to say that Blake foresaw specific kinds of reproductive printing technology; but consider even that modern photocopying degrades his work dramatically. It is clear that Blake wanted to control the production of his work in order that he could manage those details so often lost in any kind of cost-saving, "mass" production format. We can return to the marginalia by noting how Blake's marginalia participate to some degree in the dependence on materiality shared by much of his other work, and which has suffered so drastically in the face of editions which must (or which choose to) submit to economic constraints. That a volume of Blake's marginalia which provides photographic facsimiles still, as of 2001, does not exist, stands as testament not only to the "marginal" position the marginalia continue to occupy in Blake scholarship, but also to the related sense that the returns, both scholarly and economic, from such a volume would not make it worthwhile.

Synecdochic Structure in Blake's Marginalia: The W(H)ole of Blake

The critical approach to Blake's marginalia that my own approach opposes, and the one which does them the greatest disservice, is evident clearly in Thomas McFarland's "Synecdochic Structure in Blake's Marginalia." As the title suggests, the author sets out to uncover in (or perhaps recover from) Blake's annotations the "whole of Blake" (79). But this whole of Blake is a hole of Blake: an empty space first created by the assumption that there is a Blake to be found but that escapes us because he has been otherwise to-date too fragmentary, too amorphous, too dilute, too piece-meal, too contradictory. Into this hole of Blake are fitted details gathered through a systematizing

reading strategy which discovers, not surprisingly, what it had initially posited to exist: a whole Blake. Absence makes the project possible, since contradictions and details that do not fit can be ignored; but the systematic abhors a vacuum, so the hole must become a whole, for without completeness there could be no unifying, explanatory argument.

I take McFarland's article as typical of a certain mode of scholarship, even of reading in general. Deeply "Newtonian," in the sense I have explored in Chapters 1 and 2, I would argue that it looks to create order by arranging details into categories bound by strict relationships one to the other. Posited to form a whole, details are collected and finessed until they fit together. And the space of the analysis is absolute; parts remain discrete, though their relation to the larger whole is stable, unchanging in the face of any contextual change. It would be impossible to imagine a re-constitutable reader or textual event in this case.

Contrary to this mode of reading and managing detail, I submit Molly Anne Rothenberg's *Rethinking Blake's Textuality* as an example of a different kind of scholarship entirely; (others scholars in this group include Paul Mann, Donald Ault, Nelson Hilton, Thomas Vogler and V. A. de Luca). Rothenberg asserts that "one of the principles guiding my work . . . is that Blake's corpus ought not to be regarded as a unity, as a product of a single intentional activity, nor ought it to be read as furnishing philosophical propositions" (2). Among the many compelling arguments in her book, Rothenberg asserts the displacement that Blake's art forces of the "absolute position of the subject as it was conceived in traditional Enlightenment terms" (2).

McFarland, however, asserts that in the fourteen books Blake annotated in his lifetime, "the whole intellectual ethos of Blake stands revealed, if not in comprehensive detail then by implication" (76). This is an explicit expression of the assumption implicit in David John's essay (discussed above) that "complexes of ideas" can exist, and that everything either fits the complex directly, or is close enough so we can pretend that it does.

Subscribing to Valery's notion of the marginal note as *pure thought*, McFarland writes that "the marginal notations . . . reveal Blake's intellectual essence with peculiar directness" (76-77). Quoting Edgar Allan Poe, McFarland writes that "in marginalia an author speaks 'freshly—boldly—originally'" (77). Working from Erdman's edition of Blake (the 1982 edition, not the 1988 edition), McFarland of course cannot know that in Reynolds *Discourses* for example, Blake made marginal notes in pencil and later traced some over with ink (an issue I take up in detail in Chapter 4). How "fresh" is a traced over marginal note? How "bold" is it to leave some untraced? And it is hard to know what McFarland might mean by "original." Was Blake writing things he had not thought of before? Things no one else had thought of before? Or just things he had not written down before? In any case, even McFarland admits that "marginalia . . . invade their host text" and "the marginal notation forces open the text" (78). This much is certainly true, and because marginal notes participate so deeply in their "host" it would be hard to claim them as original. They are inescapably derivative. As I had quoted above from Blake's notations to Reynolds: the reader is to expect nothing but indignation and resentment, as though Blake admits up front that if Reynolds says black, he [Blake] will say white, if

Reynolds says left, Blake says right. (Actually, this promise of indignation and resentment is itself not always fulfilled.) If nothing else, it becomes clear that we cannot count on marginal notations to reveal a philosophical construct (or even supply a "philosophical proposition," as Rothenberg suggests) which transcends on the one hand the immediacy of reacting to another's text, and on the other the process of revision that Blake seems to have put some (but not all, perhaps) of his notations through.

In Chapter 4 I address the way in which Blake's annotations, to Swedenborg's *Divine Providence*, for example, reveal that he must have read the volume throughout *before* annotating. For example, In his note to #185, Blake directs attention to #69, but also to "329 at the End," "& 277," "& 203." In #69 he directs attention ahead to #185. It is thus impossible that Blake simply annotated as he read, since he is able to call attention to numbers later than the one he's annotating. To assert that any notation is fresh, bold, or original (or that all marginal notes are created equal) is highly suspect, when it is clear that Blake must have returned to certain passages (or reread entire volumes), not necessarily making marginal comments upon first reading. Indeed, to cross reference, as Blake has done for numbers 69 and 185 in *Divine Providence*, suggests a good deal of thoughtful rereading. Thus his reactions might not have been as "bold" or "fresh" or immediate as some scholars seem to think.

To return to the issue of originality in reference to Reynolds' *Discourses* though, despite Blake's promises to do so, he does not always seem to express indignation or resentment. On page 279, for example, Blake has written in the right margin: "These are Excellent Remarks on Proportional Colour." Curiously, this is one of the notes Blake has

done in pen. The note on 266, however, "Well Said," is in pencil, though still seems to lack the indignation and resentment Blake warned of. I point to problems surrounding assertions of boldness, freshness or originality more to destabilize any possible universal claims as to the nature of marginal notations than to refute the claim that Blake is "bold" on any given occasion. McFarland remains confident, however, that "Blake's marginalia throughout are united by the common feature of synecdoche for his entire position" (86) and that "Blake's marginalia present, again and again, a synopsis of his entire meaning" (87). Such statements are circular. For what *is* his entire position if not the whole read into the hole. That is, the "entire position" is developed by a particular kind of reading of individual details, which are themselves read in light of the entire position, itself at some point divorced from the details which constitute it and henceforth imagined to transcend those details. Details go to make the whole, which is then used to organize the details.

Fitting the Whole of Blake In

Above I explored how Blake's annotations are often read with the view toward developing a synecdochic system, one which explains how the parts fit, or indeed reveal, the whole (Blake's "entire position" or "entire meaning," as McFarland calls it). I would now like to briefly consider how criticism can fit Blake himself into even larger literary, periodised structures. This does not bear directly on the marginalia, but I want to suggest how certain reading practices persist on many structural levels: from the reading of individual works, to groups of works (Blake's marginalia, for example), to his entire *oeuvre*, to broad-reaching literary eras. I use McGann's *Romantic Ideology* partly because it is a work in which synthesizing manoeuvres would seem most *unlikely*, given

the general argument against the "tendency to ignore or to gerrymander the phenomena to be studied" (24).

Writing on William Blake, McGann says that "Blake's critical devices are not innocent of ideology." McGann writes, "When his [Blake's] poems put traditional ideas to critical tests of various sorts, they do so in the conviction that the poetic vision reveals fundamental truth in a way which sets the poet apart from other men. The Romantic attitude ascribes to poetry a special insight and power over truth" (70). The logic goes that Blake is "a Romantic" since Romantics privilege poetic insight and believe in poetic vision as the path to truth; Blake, argues McGann, believes in poetic vision this way.

Curiously, McGann often slips into the practice he likes the least: "Literary criticism presents its results in finished and comprehensive forms" (28). If McGann cites authors like Harold Bloom and M.H. Abrams for their unfortunate (says McGann) tendency to arrive at comprehensive statements while often ignoring elements of their subject of study which do not conform to those statements, it is surprising to see McGann himself move from a statement on Blake, which makes no direct reference to Blake's work, to a statement on "The Romantic attitude."[1] Again, the logic seems to run thus: Blake is a Romantic, therefore he exhibits the Romantic attitude; but the Romantic attitude is defined by looking at poets like William Blake. (Note the similarity between this logic of organization and that of McFarland, who is working on the level of Blake's *oeuvre*: just as Blake, taken as a kind of specific "detail," is supposed to reveal the whole of which he is assumed to be part, so too, in McFarland's argument, are individual statements assumed to reveal the whole of which they are both part, yet which they

simultaneously define.) The wheels within wheels here amount to saying that Blake's attitude is Blake's attitude, or that the Romantic attitude is the Romantic attitude. At the crux of this particular circularity is the notion that Blake held unconditional belief in access, through poetic vision, to some fundamental truth; and that from this belief, we can easily slide Blake alongside others of the "Romantic era."

If there is in Blake's work some privileging of poetic vision in terms of what McGann calls power and insight over truth, it seems continually to assert that there *is no fundamental*. What Blake's "poetic insight" tends to reveal (or at least what his work reveals, intentionally or otherwise) is not transcendent truth, but that the category of truth is relative and rhetorical, formulated in relation to multiple kinds of contexts, and deeply involved in and constituted by the materiality of its expression. My various arguments to this point have tended to a greater or lesser degree to suggest that Blake's deep concerns for textuality make *statements* (especially written ones) of truth impossible. To return to a quotation I had used in my preface: "all telling modifies what is being said" (Richard Howard, introducing *S/Z* xi); in another context, Barthes, writing on science, asserts that "For science, language is merely an instrument, which it chooses to make as transparent, as neutral as possible" (*The Rustle of Language* 4). Blake seemed to realize the pervasiveness of this view of language and worked towards an art which would confound any reading strategy that sought stable, transcendent truth or perspective. Consider that even Blake's visions of the apocalypse make no pretension toward arriving at fundamental, if by that we also assume "universal," truths. Instead, the revelatory moment in *Jerusalem*, for example, is one in which individuality, not universality, is

asserted. "In forgiveness of sins which is Self Annihilation," Bacon and Newton and Locke and Milton and Shakespeare and Chaucer stand fourfold and converse in what Blake calls "visionary forms dramatic" (98). They create space and time "according to the wonders Divine of Human Imagination" which gives primacy to individual perspective and creativity (98:32). Space and time do not subsume the individual in a predictive and prescriptive system. In the *Four Zoas*, at humanity's point of destruction and redemption, Urizen confronts the question he had, up to that point, denied: "I have Erred & my Error remains with me . . . Where shall we take our stand to view the infinite & unbounded / Or where are human feet for Lo our eyes are in the heavens" (Night IX, page 122). Even if the poet's vision can arrive at some fundamental insight, it will always come into conflict with the fixity of the material page and with having to communicate that vision via material media. Even if the way I have formulated this particular argument for Blake's poetic insight seems to credit Blake with too much in the way of intentionality, I might still argue that intentionally or otherwise, his work creates conditions of reading in which even the most ardent reader's efforts to "learn truth," or to gain access to some privileged, visionary transcendence, are continually confounded by persistent material instabilities.

Thus what ultimately seems to confound projects, of whatever scope, which try to pronounce a "whole" of Blake, or which try to fix him in place in some larger literary structure, is the persistence of details which do not fit the system. It is in this sense that I think "marking"–as an activity which occurs in and to so much of Blake's work–is so crucial. For it is in the detailed marks made to pages, and the way in which the reader

must re-mark (that is, take note of, but also change, and be changed, by the very act of seeing) those details that Blake couches his most trenchant anti-system critique (or from which such a critique can be made to arise, to say it in a way that avoids asserting authorial intentionality). But as Blake himself has written, "not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular <as Poetry admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass <Insignificant> much less an insignificant Blur or Mark" ("A Vision of the Last Judgement" 560). The blur is significant, in this context, I think, not because it "stands for something," that is, acts a symbol in its own right, but for the very reason that it *does not* symbolize–it cannot be absorbed into a larger iconic system. For any system to function, certain blurs and marks (those which do not fit a pattern) will necessarily be ignored. Thus the colour printing process that Blake invented (which I discussed in Chapter 2) took the form that it did, likely because it created those chance, random blurs and marks whose "insignificance" (or more correctly, their lack of signification) allowed them to operate outside a prescriptive system of meaning; yet at the same time colour printing allowed Blake the opportunity to articulate minute lines and figures (signifying marks) using ink, for example, at some point after laying on colours. *Newton* (see Chapter 2) is a fine example of the combination of articulated detail, in Newton's body, for example, and chance formations, in the coloured space around him. From the minute level of non-uniformity, Blake's anti-system poetics scales out to his most broad-reaching critique of commercial art and industrialization.

Marking

As I had mentioned above, there is no shortage of marks and marking throughout Blake's work; it is useful to consider just some of those instances. For example, when the Bard in *Milton* begins his song with "Mark well my words!" (96) what is he really saying? Is it a simple call to listen and wait, perhaps for a moral as medieval bards might have provided. Or is Blake's bard calling both his audience in Heaven, and us as readers, to listen to his words (to be marked ourselves by these words) and to contemplate why they moved Milton to descend from Heaven to seek his separated emanation, and how, if at all, they can be of our eternal salvation as well as Milton's (96). Is the bard telling us to mark words as readers physically marking a text? Does the invitation to mark imply that we are to bring something to the text by way of our own "style," our own touches.

In "London," Blake writes, "[I] mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness. marks of woe." which reminds us that *marks*, for Blake, have a dual nature (*Illuminated Blake* 88). It is also possible that the "mark in every face" is actually a command, spoken by the narrator to the reader, telling us to look at what the narrator is looking at (as though we are there too, as he or she points to faces in the London crowd). The narrator is implicated in London's crowd as participant, creating as he marks, just as Blake literally imposes himself on the copper plate. That the narrator marks faces suggests the way he creates them as observer; the invitation for the reader to "mark," of course implicates us as well. In fact, Blake altered, "see in every face I meet" in his first notebook draft to the more resonant, "mark in every face" suggesting the extent to which Blake wanted to complicate the interconstitutive relationship at work between reader and narrator and

scene of woeful Londoners (796). But London seems already to have marked its inhabitants in such a way that Blake can read their faces as something more than personal reflection. The idea that the internal condition of a human figure, or an entire city for that matter, is readable by marks on the external surface, is perhaps not surprising from an artist who spent his life engraving on copper plates such that the physical marks on their surfaces would reveal an internal world of narrative, myth and vision. And that Blake would call attention to the dual nature of marking as a way of *reading and writing* is again played out in his marginalia in which Blake is marked (affected) as reader while marking (affecting) as writer.

Conclusion

Blake likely staked great importance on his own work's ability to mark his readers, to fundamentally alter how they read and how they lived in the world; much of his art invites the possibility that reading itself can be a character in the narrative; (consider "you risen," as I had suggested in Chapter 2). One cannot imagine, for example, Urizen offering his books of metal to a general readership for reaction and annotation. Urizen's "solid without fluctuation" is codified in his books of metal. Marginalia is clearly a way for Blake to create a multiplicity of ideas from the "One King, one God, one Law" of the un-annotated book (72). Hopefully the context I have introduced up to this point, of reading and writing as important symbolic acts in Blake's work, can help to make the marginalia a more central concern for Blake scholars since so much of what goes on in Blake's "art" is informed by his practice as an annotator (I argue that the marginalia are, in fact, part of Blake's art).

In one sense, Blake moves from the order of the finished page to the disorder of the annotated page in his project of "marking." Or, to use different terms, he moves from fixity to fluidity. If nothing else, Blake's marking of the page calls attention to the otherwise transparent nature of the fixity that the printed page suggests; (McGann calls this, "the kind of authority which the book-form in itself lends to the words it contains" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 12).) That is, the "finished" page may appear finished and stable, only until another perspective, voice or, literally, hand, enters into it. The sense of what annotation can really do to a page though is submerged in typeset editions; thus the need for an edition of the marginalia which supplies both photographic facsimiles and perhaps a typeset transcription (as is the case in Erdman's *The Notebook of William Blake*).

In this chapter I have tried to show how Blake scholarship has been affected by having recourse only to Blake editions which do not provide photographic facsimiles. I argue that systematizing Blake, proving a "whole" of Blake, becomes much easier when his work is typographically regularized. The great irony remains that Blake's art itself seemed to make such persistent efforts to defend against any sort of regularization and systematization. However much the editorial imperative might present it as such, Blake's art is not "safe," to return to the quotation from Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* with which I began this chapter. Blake's art is not safe in the sense that any one detail cannot be taken for granted to stand as "truthful," that is, to transcend its own context and to operate equally in all situations (as though signs could operate in the textual equivalent of Newton's proposed absolute space, a space in which the formulae he developed were

"universally" applicable). All blurs and marks have meaning in Blake inasmuch as they

are part of a larger process working against uniformity. To remove marginalia from their

context, to assert their safety, to derive from them a consistent and controlling philosophy

or theory, is all to ignore their deeply material and textual nature. In Chapters 1 and 2 I

set up a number of problems surrounding Blake and textuality; in Chapter 3 I have

suggested how such issues do not seem to have been considered in relation to the

marginalia. In Chapters 4 and 5, I make this very consideration, exploring the degree to

which the marginalia participate in the issues of materiality and textuality which persist in

other of Blake's work.

Note

1. Indeed, one might argue that the Romantic attitude privileges poetry because the "Romantic" here has been defined by the work of a certain age of *poets*. If the subject of McGann's study had been Romantic carpenters, it would be safe to assume that cabinet-making, not poetry, would be given a privileged position. McGann's statement becomes, in this sense, circular. Romantic poets privilege the insight of the poet => people who privilege the insight of the poet often become poets themselves.

Figure 3-1 *The First Book of Urizen* title page from the 1867
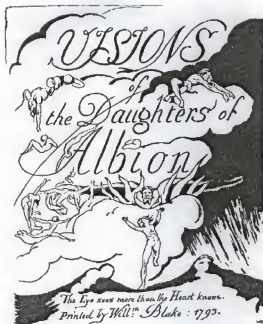*Works by William Blake*

Figure 3-2 *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* title page
from the 1867 *Works by William Blake*

CHAPTER 4
BLAKE'S MARGINALIA

I must not create a system,
or be enslaved by another

Introduction

In 1947, a letter arrived to Mr. Geoffrey Keynes from Josiah K. Lilly, Jr. It appears to be a response to an earlier request by Keynes to have the volume of Francis Bacon's *Essays Moral, Economical, and Political* (1798), with Blake's annotations, in some way reproduced so as to facilitate research and study. Lilly's response is straightforward: "it is quite out of the question to do as you request" (Lilly). Lilly continues, "there are something over a thousand entries in Blake's holograph throughout this book, present on over a hundred pages, and it would be about as expensive to have these reproduced as the book is worth!" The estimation of a thousand entries is off the mark. Even a generous count would suggest there are no more than two hundred entries by Blake–some as short as "A Lie!" Lilly is correct, however, in asserting that "the book is in very fragile condition." When I had a chance to study the book in February of 2001, it was on the verge of coming entirely apart due to the deterioration of the spine. Granted that fifty years separate my study from Lilly's assertion, but I do not believe that the book could have been in good condition even in Lilly's time. He is also right that "the Blake entries are in pencil, some of which are very difficult to read except with a magnifying

glass." "I am just sure," he writes, "that several of the entries would thus not reproduce well at all" (Lilly).

Since in his final paragraph Lilly agrees to sell the volume to Keynes for "$1,000 (U.S. dollars)," it is clear that Lilly had much to gain from asserting that the book was un-copyable, for whatever reasons; however, the letter stands as testament to the very early efforts by Keynes to attend to Blake's marginalia, and the difficulties even then presented by the materiality of the situation. There really seemed no way around the necessity of having *the actual book* if one wanted to study the marginalia.

The volume was sold for a thousand dollars in 1948, as recorded in a letter of 3 August, 1948 from a librarian at the Yale University School of Medicine to Lilly. A handwritten note at the bottom of the page from the librarian to Keynes promises that "The library will dispatch the volume to you as soon as received" (Yale correspondence). (The letter with the note to Keynes is a copy of the one actually sent to Lilly, which of course did not have the note.) The Bacon volume is now in the Keynes collection at University Library, Cambridge, U.K. The letters are included in the book box which holds Bacon's *Essays* (Keynes U.4.20).

The volume was dispatched to Keynes, who did study it. By 1957, Keynes published *The Complete Writings of William Blake* with Nonesuch Press; the volume included the annotations to Bacon (along with other of Blake's annotations), but the annotations were typeset, laid out very much as they would later be in Erdman's 1982 (and 1988) *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, with Blake's annotations accompanied by a piece of the original text to indicate their "position" on the page, that is

to say, their relation, so-called, to the original text. (In fact, I want to challenge the very basic assumption that printing Blake's annotation below the block of text it is thought to annotate really does reveal its relation to the text. Such a layout reveals *one* possible relation.) As Keynes explains, "Words underlined by Blake are printed in italic. Passages from Bacon are in smaller type" (397). There is, of course, no sense to be had of the layout and look of individual pages, the size or style of the annotations, or even their legibility.

There are points, for example, where the typeset format can be quite misleading, since annotations can be placed with portions of text to which they may not directly refer. Or, as is often the case, one annotation may make a more general comment than is suggested when the annotation is paired with a short block of the original text. For example, Erdman prints the following (the square brackets are his):

[BISHOP WATSON'S PREFACE]

PAGE [*iii*]
. . . the deistical writings of Mr. Paine are circulated . . . amongst the unlearned part of the community, especially in large manufacturing towns; . . . this Defence of the Revealed Religion might . . . be efficacious in stopping that torrent of infidelity which endangers alike the future happiness of individuals, and the present safety of all *christian states*. . .
          Paine has not Attacked christianity. Watson has defended Antichrist.
                                                                    (Erdman 612)

On the actual page, however, the annotation appears at the top of the page, not below Watson's passage; a double line (which was part of the page layout, not added by Blake) separates Blake's note from the text. Blake has underlined "christian states" but there is no textual mark that links the phrase with the annotation (elsewhere in the marginalia, Blake will use lines or brackets to indicate passages he's annotating). Since it

appears at the top of the page (the first page, no less), it would seem even more likely to be a general statement, not one necessarily tied only to a particular passage from Watson, as Erdman's layout indicates.

Additionally, legibility, which Lilly alluded to as early as 1947, presented great difficulty for me in studying the original, and forced the issue of who, if anybody, Blake imagined would (or could) read his annotations. The annotation on page 1 in Bacon, for example, which surrounds the upper right corner of text, is written in pencil that is on the one hand very thick (unsharpened) but on the other very light (perhaps from having faded over time, though not all Blake's pencil annotations are so light). Erdman transcribes the passage, "But more Nerve if by Ancients he means Heathen Authors" (621). (Keynes offers the same, but adds a period at the end of the statement, although none seems to appear in the original (Keynes 397).) I will grant that at the time of my own reading, my familiarity with Blake's handwriting was limited to the scripts he used in the illuminated works–what Erdman calls the "copperplate script" (816)–and that there is some degree of having to "get used to" his handwriting, but in this case, a word like "Ancients" (and even "Heathen" to some extent) is not, I would argue, decipherable in and of itself. The pencil strokes are simply too close together, and the pencil too dull, to be able to make out letters. Under magnification the pencil marks blur together even more than with the naked eye, making the words less, not more, readable. I would argue that it is only by context that one could guess at the correct word; that is, the text being annotated provides clues as to the meaning of otherwise illegible words which appear in the margin. This annotation ("But more Nerve if by Ancients he means Heathen Authors"), for example,

appears next to part of Bacon's text: "there be not so much blood in them as was in those of the ancients" (621).

This begs the rather intriguing question of just what such an annotation meant to Blake, given that he left it nearly, if not completely, illegible; possibly, it was much more legible when he first wrote it. And certainly the argument could be made that Blake could "read his own handwriting" even if others could not (although I have written notes to myself that days later I could not decipher). But then who was he writing for, if he was writing for any one person or audience or imagined community all the time? And what issues do we face when dealing with the materiality and textuality of an unreadable annotation? The idea, like those proposed in some of the critical literature I covered in Chapter 3, that Blake was expressing "his philosophy" consistently in the annotations suffers a serious setback if we consider the material unreadability of some the notes themselves. Hazard Adams, in his *Critical Theory Since Plato*, develops "Blake's Theory of Art" in large part by quoting from the marginalia; but some of the marginalia are unreadable. Further, the fact that deciphering the annotations sometimes depends on clues given by the original text reminds that the annotations do not function simply to express a larger philosophy which exists outside the moment of Blake himself reading and reacting to the text; at least, the annotations are not as detached from their context as some scholarship would suggest.

Crucially, arguments that Blake's annotations represent fragments of a larger whole will often depend (as is the case in Donald John's "Blake and Forgiveness" and Thomas McFarland's "Synecdochic Structure in Blake's Marginalia") on an edition of

Blake which typesets the marginalia, making it much easier to read one annotation as "synecdochic" (to use Thomas McFarland's term) of a larger body of thought; McFarland writes, "we sometimes glimpse the part that represents the whole of Blake" (79). As I had discussed in Chapter 2, the editorial hand can brush away issues of materiality, such as, in this case, illegibility. But nowhere in the Blake literature has this been pursued in relation to the marginalia specifically.

What the Santa Cruz Blake Study group called the "editorial line of interpretation," in addition to "the exigencies of typographic economics," have deep effects on the academic production surrounding all of Blake's work, including, as I want to show here, his marginalia ("What Type of Blake?" 305). But my argument is not to suggest that there is a system at work throughout Blake's marginalia to be arrived at only by close study of the original documents: for example, that he writes in a certain style to mean one thing and in another style to mean another thing. Or that when he is angry he writes larger, or less neatly, than when he is in agreement. Although each of these assertions might be true on occasion, it is not my purpose to assert a set of rules for how the marginalia operate, for I do not believe such rules to operate consistently. Rather, it is the questions surrounding how annotations exist on the page that matter for the present study, and what implications these have for our reading of the annotations and for our reading of other moments in Blake's work with which the marginalia intersect (which might, in fact, be all of them).

"The Imagination which Liveth Forever"

Certainly the matter of materiality is pressing if for no other reason than that some of the marginal notes Blake made, especially those in pencil, are literally disappearing from the paper on which they were first written. Of particular concern is the volume of Swedenborg's *Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* in the British Library (shelf mark c45e1). In this volume, as in most others, Blake filled blank pages with his own writing (an issue of spatiality I explore below); however, the blank flyleaf upon which Blake wrote is almost entirely faded and is now completely unreadable, even under 7x magnification. Infrared or X-ray photography, techniques which have been used on *The Four Zoas* manuscript, for example, may be able to recover some of what has been lost. Erdman transcribes marginalia text that is now no longer visible; I assume he was studying the annotated volumes at some time at least prior to 1965 when the *Poetry and Prose of William Blake* was first issued. Erdman notes that "the pencilled paragraphs on the flyleaf have been badly rubbed or erased, possibly not intentionally; the words supplied within brackets [in the transcription] are conjectural" (884). Erdman offers two full paragraphs; only a few words appear as conjectural. To my eye, however, as of February, 2001, those paragraphs have all but disappeared, save for at the very edges of the page where only portions of words are visible. It seems unlikely that the words were or have been erased intentionally, but rather that the pencil marks have just faded away. Whether or not the imagination lives forever is debatable, but clearly pencil marks do not. Below I discuss whether Blake could have known that his pencil markings would fade at some point. (In which case one could argue that

although the words have not likely been *erased* intentionally, their disappearance was, in some ways, intended. This example of Blake's potential awareness of the media in which he worked–that is, his awareness of the likelihood that pencil would eventually fade from a printed book's margins, for example–is striking in relation to his awareness of the characteristics of the other media in which he worked. Take, for example, the "intentional" use of the chance designs created during his colour-printing process. It is certainly possible that Blake's artistic sensibility–his awareness of the limitations of the materials in which he worked–conditioned the way he came to books he wanted to annotate.)

In addition to pencil annotations which seem to be fading entirely away, there are pages in the volume of Reynold's *Discourses* (British library shelf mark c45e18) whose edges are deteriorating to such an extent that annotations themselves are beginning to literally fall away. The edge of the annotation in the right margin of page 67 (a recto page), for example, has disappeared. What Erdman transcribes as "Generalizing in Every thing the Man would soon be a Fool but a Cunning Fool" (649), now reads more like, "Generaliz / in Every th / the Man w / soon be a / Fool bu / a Cunning / Fool." Page 64 has suffered during the process of rebinding. The bottom of the page has been cut so as to destroy some of the annotation; Erdman's transcription reads "Age & Youth are not Classes but . . . <Properties> of each Class so are Leanness & Fatness" (648). However, after "Properties," all that remains of the last line is "Classes so are Leanness & Fatness." Page 71 offers an even more striking example: what Erdman transcribes as "let them look at Gothic Figures & Gothic Buildings . & not talk of Dark Ages or of Any Age : Ages are

all Equal But Genius is Always Above the Age" (649) now reads, "let them look at Gothic Figures / & Gothic Buildings . & not talk of Dark Ages or of / Any Age : Ages are all Equal . But Genius."

Erdman also asserts that "Blake's notes [in Reynold's *Discourses*] were written first in pencil and later, with erasures and additions, in ink. Differences . . . between pencil and ink versions are treated as deletions and additions" (886). However, there are many pages on which the words that Erdman asserts to have been in pencil no longer appear, either to my naked eye or under 7x magnification. Curiously though, there are some pages on which the marginal notes have been quite clearly written over with ink yet the pencil is *still* clearly visible beneath. This prompts the speculation that Blake may have used a different pencil for various annotations, and thus may have annotated at many different times throughout the course of his owning the book (perhaps over the span of a few hours, a few days, or a few years). Erdman calls attention to the general assumption that "these marginalia are all of one kind written all at one time," though the variously faded pencil annotations may suggest otherwise (886).

Further puzzling is the disparity between the care with which Blake inked some annotations but not others. Often, the original pencil is only barely visible beneath the pen; Blake seems to have carefully traced the shape of the pencilled note. Yet in other places, there appear what amount to double words, trace lines, or ghost words, where Blake has inked the word into place, but has taken no care to follow the original's shape. For example, on page 74 Blake has inked over his original pencil note: "Here he is for Determinate & yet for Indeterminate" and "Distinct General Form Cannot Exist

Distinctiveness is Particular Not General." However, the pencil is still clearly visible (written much larger and more irregularly). Does allowing for this doubleness suggest that Blake was, consciously or otherwise, somehow responding materially to Reynolds' argument for the generality of form? The "same" annotations exist, after all, yet still visible as two distinctive sets of marks: one in pencil, the other in pen. Further, did Blake have plans to erase the visible pencil lines (or did he know that some would, indeed, fade over time)? Or did he not care that they would show (but still cared enough to ink some of them over carefully)? I am certain that he was writing in pen so as to be more *legible*, not just more permanent, which suggests that Blake imagined an audience for at least some of his marginal notes (see more below on audience).

There are a number of further questions that this re-writing raises which are worth pursuing, though they are perhaps no more definitively answerable than any of the others I have posed above. First, the question as to whether Blake could have known that, to some degree, his pencil annotations *would* disappear: if not, then why take the trouble to ink some over? In another situation, it appears that Henry Crabb Robinson, whose encounters with Blake are recorded in Robinson's *Reminiscences*, inked Blake's pencil annotations to a volume of Wordsworth, almost as if he (Robinson) too feared, or knew, that pencil would not be permanent. Further, what would persuade Blake to ink some annotations but leave others in pencil within a given volume? Or, more generally, what reasons might have caused him to not ink annotations in other volumes altogether, as in Berkeley's *Siris*, for example. Ironically, these kinds of questions disappear altogether, like pencil annotations themselves, without access to the original documents and/or

faithful facsimile reproductions (ones clear enough to represent pencil versus ink). Thus, even if I cannot answer most of the questions raised by the present kind of study of the marginalia (with attention primarily on issues of materiality and textuality) it is still crucial to note the ways in which those very issues condition the academic production of Blake. My study of the marginalia is as much a study of how we study Blake.

As for the annotations themselves though, most crucial, I think, is the sense that Blake's annotations give of a voice (or voices) trying to make itself (themselves) heard on the otherwise univocal page, though the force with which Blake wanted that voice to be heard seems to vary greatly (in this case I equate force with legibility and permanence; ink thus being more "forceful" in this context than pencil). That Blake took care to ink some of his annotations suggests that he was consciously constructing a text of his own which would respond, at points, with as much force as the original itself asserted, and which would present to the reader a series of ideas as viable, as authoritative, as those presented by the original. It is in this sense of multi-vocalizing the otherwise uni-vocal page that Blake's marginalia resonate with books, writing and reading as symbols in his poetry, and thus why the marginalia deserve attention as, paradoxically, central documents. At the very least, they should not be treated as an activity separate from any of Blake's other work as an artist and engraver.

As I had suggested throughout Chapters 1 and 2, the "book," for example, represents, throughout Blake's work, a multivalent symbol, but one that is very often connected with authority and the assertion (usually auto-rhetorical, or perhaps *autho-rhetorical*) of that authority. Take for example Urizen's command to Orc in *The Four*

Zoas to "Read my books" (Night VII: line 91). Blake's assertion (and insertion) of another perspective onto the seemingly finished page–that is, the act of annotation–represents a serious challenge to an authorial authority which is vested in material control and ownership of "the book" and therefore meaning. It is in this respect, this disturbance of interpretive authority, that Blake's marginalia function as part of the anti-Newtonian element that pervades his work. Donald Ault has written that the "Newtonian voice equates 'multiplicity' with 'confusion' and therefore needs to ground [its] direction of the reader's responses in a similar need for reduction of multiplicity to univocality" ("Incommensurability," 162). To annotate any text–to multi-vocalize the univocal text–represents a direct challenge to the drive toward Newtonian univocality.

This is not at all to argue that Lavater, or Reynolds, or Thornton, or Wordsworth, or any author whose work Blake annotated is necessarily "Newtonian," that is, espouses Newton's ideas (recall that "Newtonian" itself is a complicated term, as I explored in Chapter 1). Any particular work need not be explicitly Newtonian for Blake to have realized the anti-Newtonian implications of the act of annotating. What Blake seems to have sensed as a fundamental condition of communication in general, and communication through art specifically, was the degree to which it participated in the Newtonian drive toward stability and, to some degree, univocality. Again, the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* is illustrative: the Piper, in fixing his song into material place, causes the creative impetus for organizing that song to disappear. Though despite this loss, the song is now available to be shared. If there is something Newtonian about all communication,

it is that inescapable necessity of fixing into place, of stabilizing, that which, at some point, was fluid.

What gives much of Blake's art its intensity is its awareness of its own participation even in that which it tries to work against: the Newtonian single-vision for example. The sense of always trying to work against the text as univocal authority pervades Blake's work, especially (as I am trying to show) the marginalia. For example, there is a curious Blake manuscript, housed in Dr. Williams' Library, London, in which Blake has transcribed the last paragraph of Wordsworth's preface to the *Excursion* along with 107 lines from the Conclusion of the "First Book" of the *Recluse*. Blake has added, however, annotations to his own transcription, including marginal notes and one note at the end of the transcript. I do not imagine that Blake saw his own transcription to be "Newtonian" in any particular sense (he likely saw *all* texts participate to some degree in the "Newtonian" drive towards fixity and stability); he likely did not feel compelled to annotate his transcription *because* he realized that it was "Newtonian," anymore than I am arguing that Blake felt Reynolds' *Discourses* to be specifically "Newtonian," and thus reacted by annotating. I am suggesting rather that Blake's anti-Newtonianism, as expressed through marginalia, is much more subtle and pervasive. In any act which de-stabilized the finished page (or which introduced an element of fluidity to the otherwise fixed page) Blake realized his anti-Newtonian leanings. For as the links between reading, writing, books and authority throughout his poetry suggest, Blake was particularly aware of how the printed page could operate as a site of asserted, but also contested, authority. Thus I argue that to annotate is an "anti-Newtonian" activity,

whether or not Blake was always immediately conscious of it as such, and whether or not the content of the text being annotated was in any way Newtonian. To disrupt the fixity of the finished page is to work against the drive toward univocality which, as Ault asserts, characterizes the Newtonian narrative. And there is little more disruptive to the printed page than to fill space, which the pre-existent text could not reach, with a different perspective.

Wall of Words: The Untouchable Page

To annotate a text is to expose the limitations imposed by conventional printing. For there are, indeed, blank spaces that conventionally typeset print does not enter: by definition, the margins (among other spaces like blank fly leaves and front and back inside covers). Especially when we consider the unconventionality of many of Blake's pages, it seems plausible that part of the critique operating as Blake annotated was implicitly of the system of mass production which took all kinds of texts and fitted them into relatively uniform moulds. Not that all conventionally printed texts in Blake's time looked exactly alike, but there are, undeniably, blank margins and pages in all of the books Blake annotated which have resulted from their being printed using generally the same process. It was not authors themselves who required these spaces; it was the exigencies of print economy and technology. As Blake makes abundantly clear throughout his work, he was particularly sensitive to the connections between industry, commerce, and art. (Walter Ong remarks on the way in which "alphabet letterpress printing . . . embedded the word itself deeply in the manufacturing process and made it into a kind of commodity" (118). Blake's artistic processes often seemed to work against

the sense, as Ong expresses it, that "it was print, not writing, that effectively reified the word, and, with it, noetic activity" (119).) To fill a margin was, whether Blake fully realized it or not, to take advantage of that space left blank in the process of creating a text that could be "mass" produceable. To some degree, this is true of almost all acts of annotation; however, it is Blake's art itself which sets up the conditions under which annotation-as-critique can be seen to function in this way, for his art demands such constant attention to the visual aspect of the page, and to the very material processes which bring that page about. Consider, for example, V. A. de Luca's argument that some of Blake's pages confront the reader as a "wall of words" ("A Wall of Words: The Sublime as Text").

De Luca's general argument is that certain of Blake's pages do not just deal with sublime subjects, but that they are, themselves, materially sublime for the reader who encounters them. De Luca expresses his attention to issues of textuality, "I want to concentrate on those elements of Blake's texts that tend to withdraw from the referential function altogether. Where these elements operate, the text becomes iconic . . . not a transparent medium through which meaning is easily disseminated" (218). It is in this sense in particular that certain of Blake's pages present an experience for the reader very different than, for example, did the pages in the texts that Blake himself annotated. For these annotatable pages were the result of conventional, typeset printing, in which production uniformity and economic considerations shaped the space of the page, not, as in Blake's case, the ideals of the artist himself. Of course, there is a degree to which economics limit all pages, all things produced; however, Blake's production methods

which centralized invention, execution and re-production all in the hands of the one artist, were clearly to work against other modes of more uniform artistic production. Blake's colour printing and relief etching techniques themselves guaranteed that all versions of any given page *could* be (even if they did not end up being) drastically different from one another.

De Luca explores *Jerusalem* in terms of how some of its pages present a sublime experience for readers: "Blake's sublime of the text is no longer a matter of words on walls, inscriptions on indeterminate ground, but of walls made out of words" (231). De Luca offers the example of plate 16 from *Jerusalem* (Figure 4-1). "The attention of the reader," he writes, "is diverted from a sequential pursuit of words and lines to a visual contemplation of the whole block of text as a single unit, a panel" (232). Plate 16 offers a particularly good example of what De Luca calls "the density of inscription": 69 lines that run "virtually from one edge of the copper plate to the other, with scarcely more than a squiggle or two of visual decoration" (232). Yet it is only in the original plate itself, or in an original print, that the wall of words can exist, for as soon as the plate becomes part of a produced "book," there are new, blank margins.

Erdman's typeset edition (in the *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*) presents plate 16 of *Jerusalem* as best it can: the long lines are retained. But the sense of overwhelming compression, indeed of the sublime, to follow De Luca's argument, is lost. Further problematic is that plate 16 in Erdman begins midway down page 159, occupies all of 160, and ends less than halfway down 161. So the wall of words that occupied a full plate in Blake's version (and vision) is interrupted by nothing less than our actually

having to turn the page. Doubtless this lessens the "difficulty" the reader experiences

with Blake in the sense that De Luca explores: the walls made out of words (though I am

not suggesting Erdman makes Blake "easy").

Noting the density of pages and walls of words as they occur in Blake's work in

terms of, say, the layout of text in the volumes he annotated, does certainly invite the

observation that Blake, consciously or otherwise, has built pages that, as they were

originally presented, were in some instances un-annotatable. On certain plates in

Jerusalem, for example, there is literally no room left anywhere to write anything more.

Even pages which are not full of words, as is plate 16, would present difficulties to any

would-be annotators, given that Blake often filled spaces with interlinear designs (as in

The Book of Urizen as well), and took care to colour his backgrounds (i.e. spaces that

would otherwise not contain words or illustrations). Erdman suggests in his *Illuminated

Blake* that on plate 10 of *Jerusalem*, another wall of words, "the margins are given a sort

of vegetal texture with suggestions of interweaving forms; this and similar borders . . .

may imply a world inside the vegetable veil of Vala" (289). Filling space may sometimes

be less connected to this kind of symbol-based representation than it is to Blake's basic

desire (his compulsion?) to leave no space untouched (and thus to leave no space

potentially re-touchable), regardless of how it was filled.

Below, I consider the intersection between Blake's tracing over his own

marginalia and the figure of Urizen in *The Four Zoas* whom Blake depicts compulsively

tracing his books. These books tend to represent self-defence mechanisms for Urizen,

often against feelings of oppression (or attraction) he would rather not admit. It is quite

intriguing, I think, to consider the un-annotatable pages in *Jerusalem*, for example, and whether they (as might the books of Urizen in *The Four Zoas*) reveal a great deal about Blake's own feelings of oppression and, to some degree, paranoia, regarding his relation to the artistic establishment in which he found himself. Is the page that becomes a wall of words as much a defence mechanism for Blake himself as are the books to which Urizen compulsively returns?

That speculation aside, however, I do maintain that for Blake to co-opt the blank spaces left in conventionally printed books by asserting his own, often multiple, perspectives, is to call attention, consciously or otherwise, to the material effects commerce, broadly speaking, can have on art. For it is a particular kind of production process which makes these very spaces available; and it is those spaces which Blake's production processes looked to keep under the control of the artist.

Annotating : *The Four Zoas* : Tracing

In Chapters 1 and 2 I explored some of the ways in which books function symbolically in Blake's work (in *The Book of Urizen*, for example). Books like those of, or by, Urizen, and indeed Blake's *Book of Urizen* itself, tend to bind both readers and writers into an iterative loop whereby the writing/reading of books defines the writer/reader of books, yet where the writer/reader of books shapes what those books will be. Often, readers of Blake's books find themselves caught in the same dilemmas of iterative becoming and creating as those faced by the characters in the books themselves. For example, there seems no "outside" from which an unproblematic voice can speak the "truth" of events in *The Book of Urizen*, for even the prophetic voice is perhaps inspired

by Eternals who themselves see events from a particular perspective (which itself is defined in relation to Urizen's movement away from Eternity). And while *Urizen* is itself a poem about Urizen trying to gain access to an unchanging perspective which transcends the chaotic world around him, *Urizen* the book presents innumerable problems for readers looking to gain access to a stable text, and thus to establish a stable perspective "outside" the text from which to judge character and narrative, and from which to decide upon an "ideal" text.

I had asserted in Chapter 2 that in a work like *The Book of Urizen*, reader, writer, and the processes of both reading and writing are deeply implicated with one another. There is another such intersection which emerges when we consider Blake inking over his pencil annotations (as in Reynolds' *Discourses*) and the motifs of tracing and rewriting that appear, particularly as activities associated with Urizen, in *The Four Zoas*: "For Urizen fixd in Envy sat brooding & coverd with snow / His book of iron on his knees he tracd the dreadful letters" (VII: 1-3). *The Book of Urizen* is, as Paul Mann suggests, "a book about books" (49), suggesting that Blake's struggles with book writing and producing found their way into the artistic results of those struggles (his books). I argue that it is equally likely that Blake's self-awareness of his habits as reader and annotator, particularly of re-tracing his own notes, also found their way into his poetic work. While I am not suggesting a direct, or conscious, cause-and-effect relation between Blake's annotating and motifs which appear in his poetry, there are certainly particular intersections which illuminate some of the implications of annotating as Blake practiced

it. (For one as attentive to minute particulars as Blake was, it seems unlikely that the implications of his day to day activities on the art he created would have escaped him.)

In Night the Seventh of *The Four Zoas*, Orc rages against Urizen. He, Orc, is nailed to the burning rock, but Urizen is not similarly bound. "Why shouldst thou sit," Orc asks of Urizen, "cold grovelling demon of / woe . . . thou dost fixd obdurate brooding sit / Writing thy books . . . thy pen obdurate / Traces the wonders of Futurity in horrible fear of the future" (VII: 3-16). (The extension of Urizen's obdurate-ness into an obdurate pen suggests very immediately that one writes what one is.) And in the midst of Orc becoming a "Serpent form," and Los sitting in the "showers of Urizen," "Urizen tracd his Verses / In the dark deep the dark tree grew" (VII: 4-11). In these examples, Urizen is explicitly "tracing," though it is unclear if, each time, he is tracing that which he has already written, that which he's already imagined (though this possibility is complicated since writing often makes imagining possible), or if tracing is a form of displacing, that is, writing that which already exists but in a new medium. It is grammatically possible that: Urizen traced his verses in the dark deep meaning that *he* was in the dark deep; that he traced *onto* the dark deep; and/or that "In the dark deep" describes where "the dark tree grew." The grammatical tie created by the lack of punctuation plays out endlessly in the narrative interconstitution in Night the Seventh of Urizen's envy for Los and for Orc, his writing to control Orc, the eruption of the root of Mystery, Urizen's own entanglement in the labyrinth of roots, his compulsion to arrange his books around him, all save the book of iron, which seems to become the rock of iron to which Orc is nailed:

Los felt the Envy in his limbs like to a blighted tree
For Urizen fixd in Envy sat brooding & coverd with snow
His book of iron on his knees he tracd the dreadful letters
While his snows fell & his storms beat to cool the flames of Orc
Age after Age till underneath his heel a deadly root
Struck thro the rock the root of Mystery accursed shooting up
Branches into the heaven of Los they pipe formd bending down
Take root again wherever they touch again branching forth
In intricate labyrinths oerspreading many a grizly deep

Amazd started Urizen when he found himself compassd round
And high roofed over with trees. he arose but the stems
Stood so thick he with difficulty & great pain brought
His books out of the dismal shade. all but the book of iron
Again he took his seat & rangd his Books around
On a rock of iron frowning over the foaming fires of Orc
                    (VII: pages 77-78)

It is unclear just what "letters" are being traced by Urizen, but the "sense" of a

passage like this one seems to be that causation is often a mere textual device. That is,

Los feels Urizen's envy (for himself or for Orc) *"like* to a blighted tree" [my italics]

following from which an actual root and branches erupt. One of Urizen's books is iron (a

characteristic textually "caused" by the iron monsters that chase him) though he leaves it

behind, thus "causing" the rock he sits on to be "a rock of iron." It is almost as if the

appearance of a *word in the poem* allows for, or causes, the possibility for that word to

appear again, though its movement from one context to another need not follow a logic of

narrative causation. With *textual* (as opposed perhaps to *thematic* or *narrative*) causation

at work, it becomes difficult to say what effect Urizen's tracing really has on narrative

events, or whether tracing in fact *creates* the conditions necessary for certain events to

occur at all. If it is the writing of words which makes certain dimensions in the narrative

field possible (i.e. the word "iron" must be written by Urizen in order that it migrate from

one point in the narrative to another), then tracing becomes both an incredibly powerful, but potentially uncontrollable activity, in that multiplying possibilities in the textual field opens the narrative field to correlate multiplicity.

Marginalia as Path : Further into *The Four Zoas*

Donald Ault, in *Narrative Unbound*, explicates some of the issues surrounding Urizen's books in *The Four Zoas*. They are books of iron and brass, which Ault asserts are "direct responses to the monsters [whose scales and fins are made of iron and brass] who devour his [Urizen's] path" (220). The books are, as Ault writes, "one solution to the problem of making a linear path in a pathless space" (220). In the context of *The Four Zoas*, Urizen's books are "a defense mechanism," a "remnant of his need to survive" (225). The compulsion with which he traces (into) his books reflects his own attempts to deny, among other things, what Ault describes as Urizen's "subjugation to Orc" (245). Urizen's books, as they emerge from and submerge into, the narrative field, along with his compulsive tracing, tend to mark those moments where "Urizen's control is severely threatened" (221).

My point is not to try to untangle *The Four Zoas*, but to bring to light the relation between Urizen's tracing (again, Blake seems careful to maintain "tracing" as the compulsive action as opposed to "writing") and Blake himself tracing his own annotations. I quoted liberally from Ault's work since his explication of Urizen and tracing books makes it possible for me to draw a number of parallels. Urizen tracing his books, as representative of his attempt to form a path through otherwise pathless space, resonates with Blake himself trying to organize the "pathless," or unused, space of

another's text, to create for himself a kind of space in which to move, to mark the page for himself, and to arrange his own "marks" in relation to anothers'. If the printed words of an existent text represent the only way readers can move through a book–that is, quite simply, there is only the one printed text to read–then marking in the margins really does seem a way of creating an alternate path through an otherwise fixed space. Certainly a substantial number of Blake's annotations are meant to oppose the primary text, forcing the reader's awareness, not just of alternate arguments, but of the way in which printed texts suppress those alternatives. Margins are thus not transparent and empty, but are opaque and brimming with alternatives.

Further interesting are those moments when Blake's annotations suggest a different way of moving through the existent text. It is obvious to note that books are paginated (or sections numbered) such that readers can move through the argument "properly" by following consecutive numbers. It is perhaps so obvious that it has become one aspect of the control which texts exert over readers that now goes unnoticed. (Jerome McGann, in *Towards a Literature of Knowledge*, asserts that "the printed book is one of the most illusionistic of human works, imputing as it does an aura of permanence to the discourses we manipulate" (12). Philip Cohen, introducing *Texts and Textuality*, writes "the layout, typography, binding, paper, and ornamentation of a book work in concert with or in opposition to the linguistic text they convey" (xvi).) But just as Blake's annotations can remind us that the original text suppresses certain arguments and perspectives in favour of its own, so too can his annotations remind us that a text suppresses the control it exerts over the reader in terms of guiding movement through

itself. There can be, as Blake's annotations sometimes reveal, different paths through a text; in this sense, to annotate is to reveal the illusion (to pick up McGann's metaphor) of control a text exerts over itself and its readers. Often, by challenging the implicit authority a text has over how it is to be read (that is, the material conditions of consecutive pagination, for example), one also challenges the authority a text exerts over its own meaning.

As I had alluded to briefly in Chapter 3, Blake annotates the numbered entries in Swedenborg's *Divine Providence* by harkening to other numbers, sometimes earlier, sometimes later in the volume. The annotation to Number 198, for example, reads, "Mark this it explains N 238." More striking is perhaps the annotation to Number 330: "Swedenborg contradicts himself & N 69 See also 277 & 203 where he says that a Place for Each Man is foreseen & at the same time provided." Blake seems at once to be formulating his own path through the text, not only by inserting his own text in the space available, but also by suggesting that the reader can move among the numbered sections in ways other than by proceeding in "order." Indeed, Blake asserts that his path (to move from 330 back to 69, or 277, or 203) will reveal a contradiction in the existent text, likely a contradiction that does not emerge so easily (or at all) if the pre-existent path is followed (that is, the sections read "properly," in order). It is in this manner of creating alternate paths through a text that Blake's annotations reveal the authority of texts as potentially fraudulent, or at least as dependent on certain material conditions (like numbered sections) for their argumentative force, as on the content of the argument itself. Thus issues of textuality are important to the marginalia, in that the appearance of

univocality is dependent to some extent on the material arrangement of a book. Meaning (even "truth," so-called) is authorized not just by the author (though the Newtonian text will pretend as much) but equally by the material conditions of a book. The Santa Cruz Blake Study Group suggests that "The effects generated by the emblematic characteristics of the book will constitute a significant part of the terms on which the contents of the book are offered and received" (311). And further, "Our ability to read has been conditioned by our familiarity with traditional linear text forms and *the consistent and powerful appearance they present*" (310; my italics). It is particularly the "powerful appearance" of the book which plays such a crucial, yet at the same time subtle, role in reading. Blake's marginalia function to call attention to the material arrangement of books, even the regularity of their typeset, by occupying spaces that should not be occupied (margins, for example) and by presenting an irregular script. Marginalia can remind us that our willingness to accept as authoritative that which we read is deeply conditioned by material appearances; in the case of Blake's marginalia, this occurs, ironically enough, when material appearances are disrupted.

For Blake to trace his path, his marking of dead/suppressed space, his assertion of a new text in the margins, is particularly significant if we read the activity through Urizen's tracing in *The Four Zoas*, for it suggests that such tracing may have been, for Blake just as much as for Urizen, a kind of defense mechanism, a kind of path making, and finally a kind of assertion of control over that to which he, as any reader, is ultimately subjugated: the book itself as he/it confronts it/him. Ault even suggests that we get a somewhat "sympathetic account" (however short-lived that sympathy may be) of Urizen, who "is

writing the [his] journey in the [his] books (creating the journey by writing it)" (226).
"And the writer, Ault continues, "(whether Urizen, the narrator, or Blake himself) is
apparently under duress to write this nightmare journey: he cannot refuse" (226). If the
intersection I am suggesting between tracing in *The Four Zoas* and Blake's own
annotating is anything to go by, it is not a stretch at all to see "the writer" in *The Four
Zoas* as an aspect of Blake. That Urizen is compulsive about his writing and tracing may
speak to compulsions that Blake himself felt to oppose certain texts (and readerly
pathways through those texts) with a marginal text/pathway of his own. The annotations
to Reynolds' *Discourses* certainly suggest the level of anxiety (not to mention
displeasure) Blake felt to respond materially to a figure against which he so completely
aligned himself. It is not then surprising that it was in this volume particularly that Blake
seemed to take the greatest care in inking into place those annotations which would go to
form an authoritative voice to rival that of the author.

Blake worked on *The Four Zoas* from the late 1790s (using paper from his project
to illustrate Young's *Night Thoughts*) into at least 1807 (817). The annotations to
Reynolds, which feature a good deal of tracing ink over pencil, were likely done during
roughly the same time frame, from 1798 (the date of the publication of the Reynolds
edition) to 1808 or 1809. (There are no annotations in the second and third volumes of
Reynolds' *Discourses*; however, Blake refers to them in his notebook along with
reference to events of 1808 and 1809 (886; Keynes 908).)

It must have seemed a curious thing that his activities as a reader and writer (an
annotator) were tending towards those activities of one of his most complex poetic

characters. Or put the opposite way, it perhaps comes as no surprise that one of Blake's most complex characters (one whose significations are constantly slipping from what they initially seemed) embodies the tensions and contradictions within Blake's own practice as a reader and writer. Certainly though, Blake's sense of what it meant to read and to write, or what it meant to combine those activities into that of annotating, is expressed in a character like Urizen in, for example, *The Four Zoas*. We see again that the "books formd of metals" that Urizen creates in *Urizen* (at least in some of the copies) really are, for Blake, "books formd of me- / -tals" (Erdman *Illuminated Blake* 186).

At many points throughout the marginalia, it seems as though Blake is taking a completed book and recreating it as a new kind of document, featuring entirely new personalities which emerge from the spaces left blank by the original printing. They become books re-formed by the "me" of Blake at that time, indeed by the various "me's" of Blake as he responds to the text. As I had outlined in Chapter 3, I think it is misleading to imagine "a singular Blake" whose marginalia reveal a consistent intentional activity or a "philosophy" which exists to be expressed from outside the immediate context of what is being read.

The Opinion of Will Blake

In annotations like those to Reynolds, Blake is very careful to reveal his own contextual position relative to the work he's reading and responding to. On the blank page on back of the title page, Blake explains his position at length (I have quoted portions of this previously):

>Having spent the Vigour or my Youth & Genius
>under the Oppression of Sir Joshua & his Gang of Cunning
>Hired Knaves Without Employment & as much as could
>possibly be Without Bread . The Reader must Expect to Read
>in all my Remarks on these Books Nothing but Indignation &
>Resentment . . . Reynolds and Gainsborough Blotted & Blurred
>One against the other & Divided all the English World between
>them Fuseli Indignant almost hid himself _ I am hid

Ironically, the last word, hid, is itself almost obscured by the edge of the page as

Blake was running out of room (and as the page deteriorates). But it is clear that Blake is

looking to set himself up, or more correctly, to set a text up, which opposes that of

Reynolds. Even more revealing is the direct address to "The Reader"; here at least, Blake

is fully, explicitly confident that somebody will be reading the volume that he has

annotated. Whether they will be reading for Blake's work or for Reynolds' seems

irrelevant to Blake's sense of his own words standing irremovably next to, above, below

and around those of Reynolds.

The instance of the word "hid" becoming almost hidden thanks to lack of room on

the page is only one example wherein blank space in the text became for Blake the

occasion to offer some comment, often as much as space would allow, and thus to arrange

that comment under the conditions permitted by the material arrangement of the book

itself. Just as his notes are often deeply embedded conceptually in the text which they

surround (and are thus in some ways controlled by that text), I argue that the material

layout of the original controls the possibilities open for Blake to establish other voices on

the page. If there had been fewer blank pages, or smaller margins, would we have less

annotation? Or would Blake simply have written over the existing text?

This is another set of unanswerable questions. But it seems that for an artist who so often wrote *over* other work (as in *The Four Zoas* for example) and who applied paint in various layers using the colour printing process, Blake has left the original text in his annotated volumes for the most part untouched (one notable exception is Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, though even here Blake has crossed out Lavater's words and carefully inserted his own, leaving both readable). There are occasional underlinings and brackets in the margins (for example, in the annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, Blake uses large } shaped brackets to "collect" lines, next to which he writes "Note this" (sections 410 and 411) or "Mark this" (section 421). But rarely does Blake deface the original text–even the crossed-out words in Lavater remain easily readable. It is almost as though he has been careful to preserve the original, for the more accessible it remains, the greater relief are his own positions thrown into. While he does not deface the text by rendering it illegible, there are pages on which Blake's extensive use of the blank spaces makes it almost impossible to go to the original first and not to the annotations (thus altering what would have been the original path of reading). Consider pages 126 and 127 in Blake's volume of Reynolds' *Discourses*. 126 and 127 are facing pages. With the book opened flat, Blake's annotations can be seen to encompass the entirety of the margins surrounding the two pages. That is, the entire left margin of 126 is filled, as is the bottom, in addition to the entire right margin of 127 (and its bottom margin). (Another good example of this kind spatial arrangement can be seen in Blake's annotations on pages 2 and 3 to Watson's *Apology for the Bible*; Figure 4-2.) This creates the effect of an original text entirely surrounded, not just by notes like "Mark

this" or "A Lie" (as appear elsewhere), but by continuous expression which occupies

almost all the space available. The annotation which runs the entire length of the left

column of page 126 and into the bottom margin reads:

> According to Reynolds Mich Angelo was worse
> still & knew Nothing at all about Art as an Object of
> Imitations Can any Man be such a fool as to believe that
> Rafael & Michael Angelo were Incapable of the meer
> Language of Art & That Such Idiots as Rubens :
> Correggio & Titian Knew how to Execute what they could
> not Think or Invent.

Of course my typeset version suffers as much as Erdman's, likely more. The

actual line breaks as they occur because of the limited space Blake is working in go

something like: "According / to Reynolds / Mich Angelo / was worse / still." Many of the

semantically tricky spots in typeset versions, where one idea runs into the next to the

point that they are hard to separate, are much less severe when the line breaks are

restored. For example, if we read "According to Reynolds Mich Angelo was worse still

& knew Nothing at all about Art as an Object of Imitation," the next line "Can any Man"

could read like a question. As in "can any man know about Art as an object of

imitation"? Reading on, however, we see that Man is actually the subject of "be such a

Fool," yet again the possibility presents itself that Blake is asking, "Can any man be such

a Fool as to know nothing of Art as an Object of Imitation?" Reading yet further reveals

that the most likely sense of the lines is to break the first semantic unit after "Imitation,"

and that the next phrase actually reads, "Can any Man be such a fool as to believe that

Rafael & Michael Angelo." Restoring the line break–"Art as / an Object of Imitation /

Can any / Man be"--makes Blake's notation seem much less like the collection of run-on

sentences suggested by Erdman's typeset edition (or by my own use of quotation above).

Returning to the issue of Blake's use of space, it is clear that the margins

provoked him to develop a textual "voice" that was going to be deeply connected to the

text that occasioned it (just as Blake warns that the reader is to expect a direct *response* to

Reynolds, yet which would vie with that text for equal importance on the page. In

Reynolds especially, there is the sense that Blake is carefully constructing (literally inking

into permanence) a definite, alternate voice (or voices) which is to control as much of the

page as it can, and which is not just to comment on Reynolds' text, but which is to

develop a position of its own.

The question regarding who Blake might have imagined himself to be writing for

is crucial here. In Reynolds at least, we have a direct address to the Reader. In addition,

Blake takes care, despite the limitations imposed by the margins, to formulate a text

which is to be as "central" as Reynolds'. So Blake writes on the Reynolds title page, in

letters much larger than the original, "This Man was Hired to Depress Art This is the

opinion of Will Blake my Proofs of this Opinion are given in the following Notes."

Blake expressly names himself as author. And the positioning of these lines in relation to

those printed on the title page is uncanny. While he does not render the original

unreadable, Blake has used the blank spaces between the printed lines to provide his own

title page of sorts--what amounts to a centred title, "This Man Was Hired / to Depress

Art," attribution, "This is the opinion of Will Blake," and subtitle, "My Proofs / of this

Opinion / are given in the / following Notes." Further, Blake has underlined "Reynolds,"

perhaps to highlight that while the *Discourses* might purport to represent the tastes of a larger community (one from which Blake felt particularly excluded) they are nonetheless the opinion of just one man. Blake even stylizes his lettering on this page–the "H" of "Hired" is complete with flourishes, as are the "D" of "Depress," and the "A" of "Art"–perhaps to challenge the uniform regularity of the typeset original. In Figure 4-3 I have done my best to reproduce the page (with some omissions), though it suffers from the usual problems of typesetting. The idea is to suggest the way in which the original title page and Blake's annotated "title page" exist together on the page.

It is perhaps no surprise that while Blake did leave some of his annotations to other volumes in pencil (Berkeley's *Siris* was my earlier example) it was in Reynolds' *Discourses* that Blake took the care to ink some of his annotations, in some cases making them more legible, and in all cases making them more permanent. As Robert Wark points out in his edition of Reynolds' *Discourses*, the discourses "were prepared as formal lectures to the students and members of the Royal Academy . . . They were delivered . . . on the occasion of the annual prize giving." And most significantly, "the *Discourses* were tantamount to a statement of policy for the young institution" (xiv). It was no doubt this sense of the discourses as instructional and as statements of policy which so provoked Blake into mounting his own statement of policy throughout the spaces available to him.

Returning for a moment to the importance that books play throughout Blake's work in terms of their power to authorize and stabilize law, rules, measurement, and ideas, certainly Blake found in the *Discourses* a kind of document little different from

Urizen's books. If the *Discourses* were "statements of policy" delivered to students in order that they might learn to abide by that policy, Blake may have seen little difference between them and, for example, the "secrets of wisdom," the "Laws of peace, of love, of unity: / Of pity, compassion, forgiveness . . . One command, one joy, one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One Kind, one God, one Law" (*Book of Urizen* Plate 4, lines 25-40; see Chapter 2 for a discussion of problems surrounding the plates of this book). Against the kind of insularity and singularity implied by the *Discourses*, Blake took care to present an alternate opinion, one that he took time to consider. Certainly he took time to choose which of his initial reactions to Reynolds he wanted to ink and which he wanted to leave un-retouched. Further, by asserting explicitly that the notes represent "the opinion of Will Blake," Blake is able not only to contextualize his own authorship, but to remind the reader that the *Discourses* themselves are of singular authorship and that their authority to represent a communal taste is potentially suspect. In addition, Blake's explicit self-representation may be as much a reaction to the particular edition of the *Discourses* he owned, which begins with "Some Account of Sir Joshua Reynolds," a biographical account, some hundred pages long, celebrating Reynolds' greatness and what he had done for the wealth and prosperity of England.

Blake reminds, however, that Reynolds was "Hired," and can therefore be under compulsion to represent a position that is not entirely his own, just as students themselves will be expected to. In fact, many of Blake's annotations refer to Reynolds' relationship to the aristocracy on the one hand (those who have hired him) and artists on the other (those who must defer to his authority). For example, Blake refers to "S" Reynolds and

"his Gang of Cunning Hired Knaves" on the blank verso of the title page. On the page which contains Reynolds' dedication "TO THE KING," Blake tellingly writes, "O Society for Encouragement of Art! O King & Nobility of England! Where have you hid Fuseli's Milton." On page civ of the "Some Account of Sir Joshua Reynolds," Blake writes, "This Whole Book Was Written to Serve Political Purposes." Erdman suggests that unerased pencil on this page also reads, "[?*First to Serve Nobility & Fashionable Taste & S*^{r}. *Joshua*]" (641; brackets and italics are Erdman's). However, I was unable to see these words; they may have faded entirely. The annotations to Reynolds represent one of the best examples of all the annotated volumes of Blake working to alter without physically destroying the original text, and to mount a text of his own in the spaces provided. His attention to detail, his address to the reader, his explicit self-presentation, and the time it must have taken to ink some marginal notes into permanence show the degree to which Blake wanted to oppose Reynolds text by producing an alternate text which demanded its share of any reader's attention.

Conclusion

What the Santa Cruz Blake Study group calls the "editorial line of interpretation," in addition to "the exigencies of typographic economics," have deep effects on the academic production surrounding all of Blake's work, but especially, as I have tried to show throughout Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4, his marginalia ("What Type of Blake?" 305). At stake throughout the marginalia are the same kinds of issues emerging from textual and material investigations into the rest of Blake's *oeuvre*–investigations made more and more possible by the publication of affordable facsimile's of Blake's major works (by the

William Blake Trust, for example). I have tried to outline some of the problems of textuality that remain inaccessible to scholars working without access to the originals or to photographic facsimiles of the marginalia (no such volume currently exists). However, attention to matters of textuality and materiality reveal how deeply the marginalia really do participate in and stem from Blake's work as a reader and writer, and as an artist and poet. The marginalia are fundamentally important to Blake scholarship, since they represent the product of Blake treating the printed page directly, itself a multivalent symbol which appears throughout his work, from the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* to *The Four Zoas*. The "book" was for Blake, and remains today, a site for both asserting and contesting authority. Blake's encounters with books do not function outside his activities as a poet, artist, and social commentator; rather, Blake's reading and writing reflect activities thoroughly integrated with reading and writing as activities which appear throughout his poetry, and with readers and writers as characters fundamental to Blake's poetic universe.
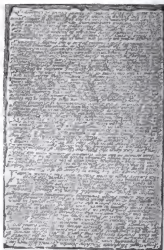
Figure 4-1 *Jerusalem*, Plate 16 (Bindman 313)

Figure 4-2 Blake's annotations on pages 2 and 3 of Watson's
Apology for the Bible

This Man was Hired
to Depress Art

THE

WORKS

This is the opinion of Will Blake

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS KNIGHT   my Proofs
of this Opinion
are given in the
following Notes

Advice of the Popes who succeeded the Age of Raphael
Degrade first the Arts if you'd Mankind Degrade
Hire Idiots to Paint with cold light & hot shade:
Give high Price for the worst: leave the best in disgrace
And with Labours of Ignorance fill every place.

Figure 4-3 Blake's annotations to Reynold's *Discourses*, title page
(Corel Photo House mock up)

CHAPTER 5
MARGINALIA: FURTHER POSSIBILITIES

Introduction

Up to this point I have pursued particular issues of spatiality that emerge from

Blake's treatment of the page. I have tried to highlight ways in which elements that share

the same page often work in conflicting ways, even where more traditional reading

strategies would look for such elements to work as compliments. One obvious example

throughout Blake's work has been text and illustration, which we might otherwise assume

would work to explain each other. Yet we often find that illustrations do not necessarily

illustrate; that is, text and design seem to be saying different things, or their relationship

is not an immediately apprehendable one if we read with the assumption that an

illustration will "illustrate" what the text says.

In Chapter 4 I looked to integrate the marginalia as an important part of the spatial

strategy which often complicates the relationship between illustration and text. The

larger context of Blake's work so insistently forces issues of textual instability and

material resistance to easy reading that whether "intended" as such or not, it is possible to

read in the marginalia an equally disruptive force at work on the otherwise finished space

of the page. My reading of the marginalia has highlighted moments of textual and

material complexity, and thus suggested ways in which the marginalia participate in the

anti-Newtonian, or anti-system, impulse that emerges throughout Blake's work.

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There are, in fact, many more complexities that deserve attention (too many to include here). However, as I had suggested particularly in Chapter 4, the marginalia represent an interesting example of Blake forging a new kind of space through the text. I had aligned this spatiality with similar issues of spatiality that occur in *The Four Zoas*, for example. What may have been submerged in my own discussion though is the sense of *time* that functions as such an important part of writing, and of course, of reading. That is, while the marginalia might operate from and in a certain kind of space on the page, they also can produce a different sense of time.

Time

The idea that Blake's marginalia suggest different ways of moving through a given text (a metaphor whose spatial dimension I have highlighted previously) also carries with it the implication that the time, or linear sequence, of our reading can be altered. Often, if we follow the marginal notes which call to different pages or sections in a text, ones that are sometimes many pages removed from the current annotation, we experience the text in a radically different way than if we read by following numbered pages or section. The marginalia work to show how there are other, often multiple, and often contradictory ways of moving through a text. Note that unless Blake were to unbind books he owned (an unlikely possibility from an economic standpoint if from no other), there could be no way to materially alter their page order. In his own work, however, Blake was able to do just this (the moveability of *individual* metal plates may have been just one of their many inviting features). The marginalia represent an interesting compromise in that pages cannot realistically be unbound, reordered, and

rebound, but annotations which suggest non-linear movements through the text function to "re-order," without materially destroying, the original volume. Blake is thus able to preserve the original text as one "copy" of the work, but can introduce new "copies" by virtue of his annotations. The multiple sequences suggested by Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* could allow us, in fact, to treat each sequence as a variant copy of the work. Thus we could speak of Lavater Copy A, or Lavater Copy B, just as we now speak of *Urizen* Copy A or *Urizen* Copy B. (Additionally, annotating by suggesting "links" to materially distant sections of a book provides a surprising parallel with modern hypertext, which also functions through "links." As is the case with annotations (especially Blake's, which do not deface the original text), choosing to make one particular link does not destroy the possibility for other links to be made. This is not to say, of course, that Blake foresaw hypertext–or even that he might react positively to it if he could see it today–but rather that he recognized the same kinds of limitations in moving linearly through conventionally printed text that hypertext itself looks to overcome. Annotation and hypertext share an interesting convergence as technologies for rethinking the space and time of conventional textuality.)

However disruptive annotation might be to possible sequences of reading, though, the literal time of reading of course does not change. No matter how we flip through the pages of a book, and regardless of whether we read pages consecutively or completely at random, 20 minutes is 20 minutes. The sense of time that the marginalia do disrupt is rather that sense that books, as argument, will only function if we move in a strictly linear fashion through the text. The texts that Blake annotated, for example, do not foreground

(and often work to obscure) the fact that reading need not be restricted to following the pages in their consecutive, printed order. The option to move "differently" through the time of any text is suppressed by what I have previously identified as the typographic and material machinery (of layout, pagination, typesetting) which works to stabilize the book. Blake's art, his books, often present a very real challenge to this kind of stability; that is, a stabilized time (or sequence) in which we can read. Take again, for example, the books of *The Book of Urizen*. In each version, the pages are ordered differently, so the sequence of reading is materially different in each case. Apart from an editorial imperative to choose an "ideal" order and circulate that as correct, there is nothing to necessarily authorize one time of the text over any other. Even pages within books participate in destabilizing the possibility for strictly linear movement through the text. Interlinear designs divert our attention since they exist, literally, between lines of text. Should we read all text first, and then look at illustrations? Should we look at the illustrations (or is it all one illustration?) and then read the text? If we choose one of these options, what do we make of a page on which the illustration occupies the top half, and text the bottom? Or illustration the bottom and text the top? Do we skip over part of the page to arrive at another, and then move back? Each of these is of course an issue of both the space and time of the page, but I now want to highlight how time, that is, the linear sequence of the consecutively numbered pages or sections of a text, is disrupted.

One particularly good example of the way in which Blake's marginalia disrupt not just the space of the page, but also the linearity of the book itself, is the annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*. (Not least because Lavater's aphorisms are numbered,

sometimes one or two to a page, and thus the typographic mechanism which is to direct the reader linearly through the text is even more overt than is the case with numbered pages. This hyper-ordering may have been what prompted Blake to annotate as he did, in a style that makes numerous links between otherwise distant aphorisms.) Blake's marginalia in this volume invite a markedly different way to read the book by working as inter- and intra-textual groups. That is, Blake marks many of Lavater's aphorisms by calling to other aphorisms or to texts beyond Lavater's entirely.

Actually, Blake tends to agree with much that Lavater has written. Blake has even encircled Lavater's name and his own in a heart on the title page, and has written on the back fly leaf, "I hope no one will call what I have written cavilling because he may think my remarks of small consequence" (Lavater). Yet Blake does offer some disagreement. Notably, it is where Blake disagrees that he will often intervene textually, by disrupting the linear sequence of numbered aphorisms by directing the reader to other, sometimes materially distant aphorisms. What emerges is a particular technology for critique, in which Blake does not just write a different opinion in the margin, but in fact disrupts the very ground on which the original argument to some degree depends (that is, the linear movement from one "idea" to the next). What the annotations force is our awareness that the text is not a transparent medium to "ideas," but that forces of textuality and materiality play a significant role in how we gain access to meaning. Whether Blake intended as much or not in each specific instance of annotating is less important than the kind of critique which emerges from the pages themselves. That is, as I have noted previously, that certain "bookish" mechanisms, submerged though powerful, operate to

suppress interpretive opportunities, but that even these mechanisms can be revealed and
destabilized by textual intervention. Again, it is Blake's art itself which in many ways
forces such issues to the very forefront of reading; it is impossible to ignore that
consecutive pagination for example, is as much a social construction as a palace or
church, and as such can be juxtaposed with other, perhaps equally viable, possibilities.
The marginalia, particularly to Lavater, destabilize the original text, and present other
possibilities for interpretation to the reader.

John Caspar Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* was translated by Henry Fuseli, and
Blake engraved the frontispiece; the volume was published in 1788 and Blake appears to
have annotated his copy, unbound, immediately. Lavater was rather generous to Fuseli,
inviting him to "make improvements [and] to omit what you think false or unimportant"
(Lavater; Dedicatory letter from Lavater to Fuseli). In addition, Lavater's final aphorism
invites readers to "interline such of these aphorisms as affected you agreeably in reading,
and set a mark to such as left a sense of uneasiness with you; and then shew your copy to
whom you please" (Aphorism 643). Blake may have been particularly drawn to such a
book as invited (rather than discouraged) readers to physically mark the text and to
circulate it. In fact, Blake has written on the first page, before Aphorism 1, "for the
reason of these remarks see the last aphorism." This represents a drastic alternative to the
linear sequence of numbered aphorisms, and further indicates that Blake did not simply
annotate as he read a volume for the first time. He likely went back, at some point, to
page one, after having read the last page.

Ironically, Blake seems to have followed Lavater's directions in the final aphorism fairly closely. He has marked certain passages with an "X" and has written "uneasy" beside some. And it does seem that Blake shared the volume with others, and/or perhaps re-read and annotated at different times. There seems to be considerable discrepancy among the major editors of Blake's work, however, regarding just which of the annotations in the book are Blake's and which are not (an issue I allude to in the final section of this chapter).

From Lavater's existing text, Blake creates a text which is both intertextual and especially intra-textual, self-referential, and thus suggests movement in the text which is not linear. Interestingly, Blake's practice as an annotator produces textual features in the annotated volume not entirely different than those which emerge elsewhere in his other work. In *Narrative Unbound*, Donald Ault describes the *The Four Zoas* "internal self-contextualizations" and "how its assumption that reading is a primary location of human being can perpetually open up new narrative possibilities" (xxiii). Close attention to *The Four Zoas* text produces, according to Ault, "a reading that is perpetually revising itself, opening from and onto itself" (xxiii). While *The Four Zoas* is likely an extreme case of intra-textuality (since revisionary layers in the unfinished manuscript poem make self-referentiality–even to the "same" lines, though at different revisionary stages–a constant possibility), the Lavater annotations, again along with Lavater's invitation in the final aphorism for readers to annotate and share the volume, force the text open in new directions, and work to show how interpretive opportunities for readers need not remain bound by textual mechanisms meant to stabilize the text.

For example, the ink note by Blake to Aphorism 3 reads, "let me refer here. to & remark on aphorism 533 & another on. 630" (Lavater). Additionally, Blake has underlined portions of the aphorism. While the underlining does not, in fact, cover words that, taken alone, make immediate semantic sense, Erdman has reprinted enough of the aphorism to give the reader an idea of what it says. Blake has actually underlined something like "looking upward / thinks himself / sky; so Nature formed / that each must see / centre of being." Erdman provides a "filled-in" version: "As in looking upward each beholder thinks himself the centre of the sky; so Nature formed her individuals, that each must see himself the centre of being" (584). (This is a particularly good example of the control that the so-called editorial line of interpretation has over the way in which the marginalia are presented for use by scholars and general readers.)

The annotation leads in two different directions, however. The original text's material layout clearly invites readerly movement from one numbered aphorism to the next. With the annotation in place, the text is opened up to two additional directions for reading, providing the reader with three choices. It is not, however, these three choices which are now important, but rather that the reader is confronted with the possibility (itself always latent in any text, though less accessible in some than in others) that there may be innumerable ways of moving through the text, and that the linear sequence seemingly authorized by the text itself is only one *choice* among many. This is to admit that Lavater's text, as it now stands, even with Blake's annotations in place, still reveals only limited ways of moving through the text, and allows for only a limited number of interpretive options. However, the possibilities for textual instability that Blake's art

foregrounds generally, and which the marginalia highlight particularly, depend on

readerly agency and the willingness of the reader to multiply textual possibilities, not to

depend on the text-as-given as necessarily complete (or on an editor to provide one,

"ideal" version). The inter- and intra-referentiality that Blake develops in his annotations

to Lavater's *Aphorisms* show how the text can be opened to new possibilities, but

become, like Lavater's text itself, a fixed text of their own, just as the books of Urizen

and the *Book[s] of Urizen* are materially fixed in their respective media. What can

emerge, however, is awareness on the part of readers that a radically different kind of

relationship between writer, reader, and text is possible–one in which texts can remain

continually unstable, continually open to vision and revision. Blake's annotations to

Lavater are worth investigating in this context then, not because they somehow transcend

their own fixed position on the page, but rather because they work (in conjunction with

Blake's art) to remind how important forces of materiality and textuality are in granting

or denying legitimacy to particular reading strategies.

Aphorism 3 calls to 533 and to 630. The annotation to 533 reads:

man is the / ark of God / the mercy / seat is above / upon the ark /
cherubims / guard it on / either side / & in the / midst is / the holy /
law. man / is either the / ark of God / or a phantom / of the earth &
/ of the water / if thou seek / -est by human policy to guide / this
ark. remember Uzzah / II Sam[1] VI : Ch :.

This annotation fills the left margin and as such the lines break almost every three words.

This actually makes the semantic sense clearer in parts; quotation as Erdman provides it,

for example, makes the annotation read like a series of run-on sentences; however, the

line breaks themselves help, in some instances, to separate one expression from another.

For example, Erdman prints "the mercy seat is above upon the ark" (596). Running the prepositions "above" and "upon" together (one suggests distance while the other suggests direct contact) can imply that Blake was unsure about which he wanted. However, with the line breaks in place (line breaks forced by the space available in the margin), the sense is more clearly that man is the ark of God, the mercy seat is above (that is, above the ark), but that the mercy seat rests "upon" the ark itself.

Particularly important, is the way in which this Aphorism and annotation, now an intra-textual feature of the text by virtue of Blake's linking Aphorism 3 to Aphorism 533, is also now an intertextual moment, calling to the Second Book of Samuel. Blake's rewriting/re-wording/revisioning of Lavater thus takes both the literal form of new words on the page, but also the textual form of new movements through the text. Lavater's text is even pressed into new service by Blake who, by calling from one aphorism to another, forces each into a new contextual relationship. Blake's note directs the reader specifically to 2 Samuel 6: "Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand." Blake's annotation warns against guiding the ark by "human policy." The immediately relevant passage in 2 Samuel 6 is likely verses 6 to 8:

> And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah
> put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the
> oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against
> Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by
> the ark of God. (*King James Version*)

An additional marginal note, this one in the right margin, reads "knaveries / are no / human / nature / knaveries / are / knaveries / See N554 / this aphorism / seems to me / to want / discrimination" (Lavater).

Following the intra-textual direction to Aphorism 554 in Lavater, we find that Blake has written (in ink, in the left margin), "human /nature / is the image / of God." In addition, he has underlined part of Lavater's text, "and what nature will he honour who honours not the human?" which occurs in the aphorism: "The enemy of art is the enemy of nature; art is nothing but the highest sagacity and exertion of human nature; [Blake underlines the following] and what nature will he honour who honours not the human?" (Lavater).

Aphorism 533 reads:

> I have often, too often, been tempted, at the daily relation of new knaveries, to despise human nature in every individual, till, on minute anatomy of each trick, I found that the knave was only an enthusiast or momentary fool. This discovery of momentary folly, symptoms of which assail the wisest and the best, has thrown a great consolatory light on my inquiries into man's moral nature; by this the theorist is enabled to assign to each class and each individual its own peculiar fit of vice or folly; and, by the same, he has it in his power to contrast the ludicrous or dismal catalogue with the more pleasing one of sentiment and virtue, more properly their own. (596)

Taken together, Aphorism 3, the annotation to Aphorism 3, Aphorism 533, the annotation to 533 (which calls to 2 Samuel), Aphorism 554, and the annotation to 554 provide a fairly complex web of both inter- and intra-textuality. This particular group of Aphorisms and annotations represent, to put it generally, Blake's comment on Lavater's approach to human nature. Blake's note that "man is the ark of God" is somewhat illuminated (to pick up the word Blake himself used to describe his engraved and colour-printed books) by the note to aphorism 554 (to which our attention is directed by the right-margin annotation to 533). It may well be that "human nature is the image of God"

(note to Aphorism 554) is the metaphysical statement that Blake concretizes in "man is the ark of God," man and ark being somewhat more tangible than human nature and image of God (note to Aphorism 533). If we integrate the reference to 2 Samuel and to Uzzah, it appears that Blake's response to Lavater's attempts to systematize human nature (and further to justify "knaveries," for example, as part of certain human natures), is to warn that human nature is the image of God, and thus that to tamper with human nature is to tamper with the ark of God, as Uzzah does with fatal results in 2 Samuel 6.

There remains yet further directions provided to the reader to add to this web. Recall that the note to Aphorism 3 did not just call to Aphorism 533 but also to Aphorism 630 (or more particularly to "remarks" on these aphorisms). Blake's textual disruptions to the book have extensive ramifications for all parts of the book and how they can function–marginal comments can become central, aphorisms can be made to gloss each other, annotations can begin to annotate from a distance. The sense of what is foreground and what is background, what is central and what is peripheral is seriously complicated.

Aphorism 630 reads,

> A GOD, an ANIMAL, a PLANT, are not companions of man; nor is the FAULTLESS–then judge with lenity of all; the coolest, wisest, best, all without exception, have their points, their moments of enthusiasm, fanaticism, absence of mind, faint-heartedness, stupidity–if you allow not for these, your criticisms on man will be a mass of accusations or caricatures

To which Blake has responded:

> It is the / God in all / that is our / companion & friend, / for our God / himself says, you are my brother my sister / & my mother; & S'. John. Whoso dwelleth in love dwelleth in / God

& God in him. & such an one cannot judge of any / but in love.
& his feelings will be attractions or repulses / See Aphorisms
549 & 554

Continuing down the left and then right margins, Blake writes:

God is / in the low / est effects / as well as / in the high / est
causes / for he is / become a / worm that / he may / nourish the
weak. [and then in the right margin] For let it be / remembered /
that creation / is. God des / cending accord/ ing to the weak- / ness
of man / for our Lord / is the word / of God & every / thing on
earth is / the word of God & / in its presence is God.

It is possible that the reader arrives at Aphorism 630 having been directed from

Aphorism 3. This marks a substantial textual revision in that the reader is invited to

move from one of the very first aphorisms (on page 2) to one of the very last aphorisms

(on page 219); there are only 643 Aphorisms in the entire volume. But of course 630

itself participates in the inter- and intra-textuality I have explored above. Blake refers

again to the bible, though this time to the New Testament (somewhat less overtly than his

earlier direct reference to 2 Samuel). The reference to St. John echoes numerous

moments in the Gospel According to John and the First Letter of John. For example,

Blake refers to "our Lord" as the "word of God," echoing the opening lines of John's

gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

God" (*King James Version*, John 1:1). Additionally, Blake's remark, "Who so dwelleth

in love dwelleth in God & God in him" echoes 1 John 4:15-17,

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God
dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed
the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in
love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made
perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because
as he is, so are we in this world. (*King James Version*)

Christ's command to his disciples to "love one another" (John 15:12) gets reiterated in The First Letter of John: "let us love one another: for love is of God . . . He that loveth not , knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). Blake's references to God as love, and to God's presence in "all" things (a word he's underlined in his own annotation) likely reflects his reaction to Lavater's insistence on dividing and classifying human (and animal and plant) nature, in part it seems so that the reader can more easily gauge how much love a knave, for example, or a plant, should receive.

In addition to the intertextual reference to the New Testament, the marginal note to Aphorism 630 also directs the reader to "Aphorisms 549 & 554." Most striking from an intra-textual standpoint is the direction to Aphorism 554, which readers could also arrive at by following the direction from Aphorism 3 to Aphorism 533, and then from 533 to 554. Though it is interesting to note that in the annotation to 3, Blake directs the reader to "a remark on aphorism 533 & another on. 630," yet the note to 533 directs the reader to "N 554," not necessarily to a remark to the aphorism per se. The direction from 630 to 554 is again to "Aphorisms 549 & 554," not to remarks on those aphorisms.

That Aphorism 554 is called to twice stresses the importance of the comment Blake has attached to it (as I had quoted above): "human nature is the image of God." This metaphysical point seems to undergird Blake's general reaction to Lavater's attempts to divide and classify, whether among forms of life (human, plant or animal) or among what he calls "each class" of humankind (Aphorism 533). Aphorism 549–the end point of intra-textual links created by the annotations between Aphorism 3 and Aphorism 630–reads "He, who hates the wisest and best of men, hates the Father of men; for, where

is the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children?" (Lavater).
Blake's annotation, in ink, is in the left margin: "this is true worship." However, the
aphorism itself has been altered by Blake, and so its relation to the annotation is highly
unstable. Blake has crossed out, with double strokes, both instances of the word "hates"
in Lavater's first sentence, though the word remains readable, as if Blake wanted to retain
access to the original. Directly above each crossing-out he's inked in "loves," the
opposite of "hates." With the annotation/alteration, the aphorism reads, "He, who loves
the wisest and best of men, loves the Father of men; for, where is the Father of men to be
seen but in the most perfect of his children?" (Lavater). Further, Blake has underlined
"the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children?" It is thus
impossible to say definitively whether the marginal note, "this is true worship," refers to
the original aphorism, to the altered aphorism, to both, to the underlined portion of the
aphorism, or indeed to each of these possibilities in varying degrees.

What is certain, however, is the degree to which this series of annotations
(including those to Aphorisms 3, 533, 630, 554, and 549) develop a text with inter- and
intra-textual dimensions, not unlike those that Donald Ault identifies, for example, in *The
Four Zoas*. Annotation always, to some degree, creates a new text, and also a new kind
of text, one in which the gravitational pull on the reader is not only "down" the page, but
is as often felt from the left and/or right, the top and/or the bottom (not to mention the
leaps invited by annotations which direct the reader to points many pages away). The
kind of new text that Blake's annotations creates resonates deeply with the other texts he
created as an artist and engraver. Of particular importance is the way in which Blake's

illuminated work (or indeed a work like *The Four Zoas*) tends towards the inter- and intra-textual as a consequence of Blake's attempts to forge a radical kind of relationship between text and reader–that is, a relationship in which readerly acts could constitute, or re-constitute, certain kinds of textual moments or narrative "facts." Ault writes of his reading of *The Four Zoas*, for example, as "a process of interpretation that require[d] constant retroactive reconstitution of 'facts' or reader 'events'; whenever I have looked back over my interpretive journey, the landscape has significantly altered" (*Narrative Unbound* xi). What *The Four Zoas* required of Ault is quite akin to what the annotated volume of Lavater requires of its reader. And so if Blake's work is taken generally to require (or to teach by requiring) a different kind of reading strategy than what is required by the highly organized and stable typographic page, the marginalia can be seen to participate as "centrally" in this reformative project.

The annotated volumes reveal different possibilities for the space and time of reading. There is an extensive inter- and intra-textual web that develops among the annotations to Lavater. The marginal notes are not just glossing certain passages of the original text (whether directly or indirectly), but are in fact glossing each other; aphorisms are recontextualized as readers are invited to move differently through the text. This multiple referentiality, this disordering of the otherwise orderly book, functions in ways similar to the textual variability present throughout Blake's work, as part of an art that demands radically different kinds of reading strategies than traditional Newtonian narrative, and that values radically different kinds of texts, ones that do not necessarily suppress their own instability. But how, for example, would "Single vision & Newtons

sleep" (722) manage an annotated text, a text composed of multiple, perhaps interfering perspectives? Further, and perhaps more importantly, how would a reader with "Single vision," or one sleeping "Newtons sleep" annotate a given text, if he or she would at all? Annotation forces an otherwise finished text into a state of potentially unstable openness; would the Newtonian reader be willing to learn from the indeterminacy and instabilities operating as part of the reading strategy Blake's work seems to invite?

This is not to ask how Newton per se would, or did, annotate books, but rather to ask what political dimensions inhere in annotation as an act which forces the potential instability and the textual constructed-ness of books to the surface, where otherwise they remain potentially submerged (yet operate no less forcefully on the process of reading). (Interestingly though, as Robert Hatch notes, some of Newton's books are "annotated and dog-eared." John Harrison's *The Library of Sir Isaac Newton* does not record any of Newton's marginal commentary, though it details the locations of Newton's books and manuscripts (Hatch, 2000).)

Areas for Further Research

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, I want to suggest some of the more far reaching issues at stake for reading the act of annotation as potentially disruptive, though in contexts beyond what I have considered to this point. However, before moving in that direction, it is important to suggest just some issues in the area of Blake's marginalia that seem promising for further research. The problems outlined below are specific and particular, in part because their larger implications have not been worked out, but also to

suggest the level of detailed analysis the marginalia will likely require if they are to be further integrated as important documents in the area of Blake studies. I offer the following to suggest just *some* of the possibilities for future scholarship.

It may in fact be appropriate to "conclude" this section of my study by reiterating that I have not tried to systematize a set of consistent rules to describe Blake's marginalia. I have suggested some tendencies and called on a few examples to show that critical issues of textuality are of considerable consequence in the marginalia, as they are throughout Blake's art. That a great deal of work remains to be done on the marginalia would in fact suggest that a definitive system to explain the marginalia (were I even able to formulate one) would more than likely have to undergo substantial revisions as scholarship proceeds. In addition, it would seem a disservice to Blake's poetic project itself, which worked so insistently against systematization, to impose a system of rules or conditions which, were the system to remain stable itself, would invariably have to ignore the particulars that do not fit.

One area for future study concerns the basic issue of correctly identifying the authorship of the writing in the books said to be owned by Blake. While this is not necessarily crucial for issues of textuality forced by annotations on the page, handwriting analysis is important if we are to have a sense of the way in which Blake treated the books he owned (and borrowed). Identifying multiple annotators at work in a volume provides a very different picture of Blake (as one who actively circulated his books) than is the case if all annotations in a volume appear to be by Blake alone. Consider again Lavater's invitation in the final aphorism of *Aphorisms on Man* in which the reader is

invited to annotate and circulate the volume. Did Blake do as the annotation requests? (Pointing to some of the contentious issues surrounding the identification of handwriting in the volumes said to be owned by Blake also functions to stress the need for a high quality edition of the marginalia in photographic facsimile as opposed to typographic format. Issues of handwriting obviously will not arise if Blake studies continues to depend on typeset editions of the marginalia. This fact itself reminds how deeply conditioned the academic production of Blake is by editorial and economic imperatives.)

One recent attribution of an annotation to Blake, though one which I would contest, is by Michael Phillips, who asserts that Blake owned and annotated a 1732 edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. G. E. Bentley, Jr., in his 1995 *Blake Books Supplement*, lists the edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, edited by Richard Bentley, published in 1732, under "Books Owned." G. E. Bentley, Jr. writes that the copy is "in the possession of Michael Phillips," and that the volume has "two annotations persuasively signed 'W B,' *probably* by the poet" (322; my italics). David Bindman has written that "I am completely certain that . . . the annotations to Milton were *not* written by Blake" (174; Bindman's italics). Unfortunately, he does not explain why he is so certain.

The volume was on display as part of Tate Britain's William Blake exhibition, 2000-2001. And Phillips himself (who worked as co-curator for the exhibition) references the volume in his book, *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs From Manuscript to Illuminated Printing*. However, the handwriting style of the annotation is rather unlike what can be found elsewhere in Blake's marginalia. Phillips links the

annotations in the Milton edition to Blake's compositional choices when writing "London." Ultimately, Phillips' reading, which links the final lines in *Paradise Lost* with the opening lines in Blake's "London," asserts that Blake imported particular words from his reading directly into his writing. The "proof" for the analysis as Phillips gives it seems implicitly to be that the annotations to the final lines in *Paradise Lost* are by Blake, and thus he was likely to have them specifically in mind as he began to draft "London." This seems to suggest an unnecessarily reductive picture of Blake's reading and writing. Incorrectly attributing the annotation thus has ramifications for Blake scholarship on a significant scale. Phillips' argument gives us a skewed sense of how "London" developed as a poem, and perhaps even how directly and literally Blake's reading influenced his writing generally.

A more general concern that may emerge as study of the marginalia continues is whether documents signed by "William Blake" are indeed by the poet, painter, and engraver, William Blake. The annotation in the Milton volume for example is merely signed "WB." Bentley writes in "A Collection of Prosaic William Blakes" that "during the poet's lifetime, from 1757 to 1827, London seems to have been teeming with men named William Blake" (172). Figure 5-1 shows a letter written by "William Blake," though not *the* William Blake. The script itself is unlike the poet Blake's, though the autograph is enough like Blake's that, taken alone, it might be confused for the poet's.

There is of course the danger that if such autographic issues begin to dominate approaches to Blake's annotations, there will inevitably be attempts to create a system to identify Blake's handwriting. However, handwriting analyses and attempts to identify

authorship based on such analyses are inexact endeavours at best. Blake worked in a
diverse array of contexts, each perhaps eliciting a different hand. He worked sometimes
on his own designs, sometimes as an engraver for hire, sometimes on manuscript drafts
(as in his notebook), sometimes composing directly on the copper plate. The range of
styles available to Blake would have been considerable.

There is also discrepancy among the major Blake editors as to which annotations
are by Blake and which may be by other writers. No editor suggests *who* those other
writers might be, though again, further research might reveal the identity of the people
Blake chose to share his annotations with. Some of the annotations in Lavater's
Aphorisms, for example, are thought to be by annotators other than Blake. Erdman, in the
textual notes to his *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* contends that
"afterthoughts were written in pencil: those on Nos. 287 and 384 probably by Blake"
(883). The note to 287 reads, "unsophisticated," and does not look at all like the
pencilled "Admirable!" to 21, likely confirming that "Admirable!" was not written by
Blake. The note on 384, which Erdman contends is by Blake is not in pencil, and so it is
unclear what Erdman is referring to (he may have been working from photocopies
himself which did not reveal differences in ink colour). Erdman further asserts that the
notes to 20 and 503 were written "by two different writers, probably friends to whom
Blake showed his marked copy" (883). Erdman does include in his transcript the note
"See 384," although there is no indication that the note is in a different ink colour. The
note to 384, in the same ink colour, which refers back to 20 and 21, is also included in
Erdman's transcription, though again no mention is made of its being in ochre ink.

Robert Essick, in his *The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collections* writes that "there are notes written in brown ink in an unidentified hand next to aphorisms 21, 280, and 384" (182). (Erdman identified notes to 21 and 384 as by Blake.) The annotation to 503, which Erdman contends is by a different writer, is suggested by Essick to look "like Blake's later handwriting" (182). Essick also comments that "Blake annotated the book on more than one occasion" (182). G. E. Bentley, Jr. concurs in his *Blake Books*, that "Blake went through the book making comments several times" (690). However, Bentley asserts that the pencil annotations to 20 ("Admirable!") and to 503 ("no fumbler kisses") "are by Blake" (690). However, the notes that Bentley describes as "written in a yellowed ink [i.e. those to 21 and 384]" are listed with his "Notes by Others" (691), indicating that Bentley does not believe them to have been written by Blake. Finally, Geoffrey Keynes, in his 1966 *Complete Writings of William Blake*, asserts that the "Admirable" to 20 (Keynes omits the exclamation point) is "probably written by another hand" (66). The notes to 21 and 384 in light brown/ochre are not included in Keynes' transcription, although the "Admirable" is (accompanied by Keynes' own note to the note: "[*probably written by another hand*]" (66; brackets and italics are Keynes'). The pencil note to 503 is not included in Keynes' transcription. No mention is made by Keynes of the annotations that are in the Lavater volume but not included in his transcription.

It would seem crucial to consider the alternatives that arise when we attribute certain of the annotations to Blake or to those with whom he may have shared the Lavater volume. The issue is not necessarily one of judging value–that is, determining what is

valuable in the book based on whether or not Blake himself wrote it; but rather, what is at stake is the kind of inter- and intra- textualizing going on when annotations are added. If all the annotations in Lavater which participate in intra-textuality–i.e. those which call to other numbers in the book–are not by Blake, then it is possible that whoever annotated in the light brown/ochre ink actually had a chance to read Blake's first annotations (which are vigorously inter- and intra-textual) and as such took up the same kind of approach, annotating by directing readers out of the otherwise linear sequence of the book.

Lavater's forthright invitation in the final aphorism for his readers to actively annotate as they read, and then to share the annotated volume with other readers (and annotators) must have struck Blake, reading in 1788, as particularly informative of the kind of relationship that could exist among author, reader, and book, for it was a relationship that encouraged involvement with the text, not one that depended on authorial control and didacticism or textual stability and finality.

In addition to the problems outlined above, there are some instances where writing in books said to be owned by Blake is not included in any of the major Blake editions (or there is discrepancy among them about what is Blake's writing and what is not). For example, although it is not included in Keynes' or Erdman's transcriptions of the annotations, on the inside cover of Blake's copy of Bishop Berkeley's *Siris* is written "absolute space 189" (Figure 5-2). The volume is located in the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge. I assume that Keynes and Erdman do not believe the note to be in Blake's hand. The script does seem to be Blake's, however, and the subject of "absolute space" would certainly have interested him. Berkeley writes that "The doctrine of real,

absolute, external space induced some modern philosophers to conclude it was a part of or attribute of God, or that God himself was space (126). And further, "Concerning absolute space, that phantom of the mechanic and geometrical philosophers . . . it may suffice to observe that it is neither perceived by any sense, nor proved by any reason, and was accordingly treated by the greatest of the ancients as a thing merely visionary" (127). In *Visionary Physics*, Ault considers "whether Blake knew these scientific doctrines in detail [i.e. those of Newton]" and ultimately speculates that "Blake did have some firsthand information about Newton's ideas" (45). Berkeley covers "Sir Isaac Newton's hypothesis of a subtle aether," as his table of contents describes it. There is no doubt that Blake did annotate Berkeley's text; however, correctly including the annotation "absolute space 189" would certainly add to our sense of just what kinds of specifics Blake might have been attending to in his reading. An exploration of "space" or "absolute space," as it is described in Berkeley, in relation to how "space" operates throughout Blake's work would require its own book-length treatment. (I allude to absolute space briefly in Chapter 1.)

The above are just a few of the very particular kinds of issues that deserve further research attention. It is impossible to predict the degree to which research in these particular areas might scale out and resonate with (or spark entirely new) more far reaching theoretical concerns.

My Dear Sir

I beg you will have the goodness to
accept my warmest Thanks for the distinguished honor
you have done me, in presenting me with your two volumes
of Poems, as well as for the pleasure, which I am
persuaded I shall enjoy in the perusal, With every
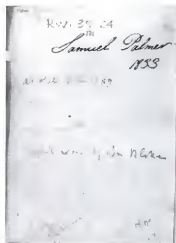sentiment of esteem and regard, I am

My Dear Sir
Your much Obliged and faithful
humble Servant
Wm Blake

Bedford Row
May 12th 1806

Figure 5-1 A letter by "Wm Blake"
(collection of Robert Essick)

Figure 5-2 inside cover of Blake's copy of Berkeley's *Siris*;
and "absolute space" detail

CHAPTER 6
AN END, AN APPROXIMATION

There is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things; nothing that demands a sharper eye or a surer, better articulated language.

- Foucault, *The Order of Things* (xix)

Introduction

Donald Ault identifies in the Newtonian narrative the drive toward closure, finality, and order. I have tried to show how the Newtonian text attempts to control its meaning by insistently coercing the reader to give over interpretive possibility to the text, and implicitly to the author. Inasmuch as the space of the Newtonian text tries to represent an absolute space of sorts, in which language reveals discovery, but does not mediate it, and in which local contexts of time and space do not affect the production of meaning, it strives for utter transparency. And as Foucault suggests, there is little that is more necessary to establishing an order of things than a highly articulated language. Surely the success with which one could argue an order into existence is directly proportional to the degree to which one can bring an articulated language to bear; that is, to assert that one used the best expressions for everything (every "thing") being expressed. It is at this intersect between (asserted) order and (asserted) transparent language that I have come to situate my study of Blake's work. Specifically, in the pages of Blake's marginalia I have identified sites wherein the role of textuality in reading (and

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thus writing and thus making meaning) can be most aggressively (re)asserted, and, by extension, the kind of desire-to-order inherent in the Newtonian text critiqued.

In this final chapter, however, I want to consider a way in which the same kind of critique can be mounted, but in a context that does not participate in the same disruptive textuality that Blake's work often does. Also, I want to extend my reading of Blake to suggest how persistent anti-system critiques have remained. I am reading "through" Blake, in the sense that I remain attentive to the issues Blake's art forces, even as I read in different contexts. This model of reading shares a great deal in common with the form of marginalia itself, for all "central" texts ("central" being the one I am reading at any given time) will always be implicitly "glossed" by other texts I have read. The metaphor of reading "through" is too linear, however. The loop is really more iterative, whereby one reading glosses a next reading, which itself retroactively glosses (or re-glosses) the previous reading. In this model, reading is always a process of constituting meanings as one is also *re*-constituting meanings (in light of new reading), and is thus itself an open process, not one that is closed or that seeks mastery in the form of closure.

What I provide here is of course not an exhaustive tracking of trends in Blake's work as they have persisted into the present. Rather, I offer a limited approximation, the suggestion that Blake's work embodied what would become a significant concern for contemporary thinkers, in part to acknowledge that Blake was confronting the same kinds of crises of representation, ontology, and epistemology that persist today, and also to give a sense that while Blake's work itself might present radical difficulties for readers, the critique he mounted against systems and social tyranny is not without its counterparts.

In particular, I look to Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* for how it incorporates a kind of disorder as part of its anti-systemic argument, and for the way in which that disorder is deployed as a political force. Lefebvre's 1974 work (translated into English in 1991) reasserts "space" as both a social product and a social producer, despite the "strictly 'geometrical' meaning" space seemed, for Lefebvre, to have taken on throughout the development of Western philosophy (1). Lefebvre's form as much as his content speaks to the energizing effects a certain disorder can bring to keep intellectual work from dogmatic closure and to destabilize systemic projects (like structuralism, central planning, capitalist production, or literary theory itself) which often require order, in the form of flattening difference, to function. Lefebvre develops a text which keeps itself resolutely open, mobile and disorderly.

There are a number of specific aspects of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* that lend themselves to consideration alongside the work of William Blake. Lefebvre insists on a level of analysis which is always conscious of itself; that is, it engages in what he calls "self-criticism" (65) (or what Edward Soja describes as Lefebvre's "nomadic meta-Marxism," for example (57)). Also, Lefebvre imagines a "unitary theory" as one which "in no way rules out conflicts within knowledge itself." These aspects of Lefebvre's work resonate with many of the issues that I have pursued in terms of Blake's work in the previous chapters, including the sense that we are persistently confronted with the "bookishness" of the very book in our hands, for example, and thus are made aware of ourselves reading as we read. Consider also Blake's use of contraries as a mode of producing knowledge and meaning that does not necessarily synthesize contradictions or

halt because of them. These elements coalesce in that most important of parallels between the two authors: their insistent anti-systematicity.

It is possible to overstate the parallel however. Edward Soja, writing in *Thirdspace*, comments on the structure of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*: "the fugue formed some protection for Lefebvre against the canonization of his ideas into rigidly authoritative protocols" (9). Importantly, even while trying to identify how Lefebvre's work attempts to protect itself from systematization, Soja must admit that only *some* protection is available. And the metaphor of the fugue is an ambivalent one. It does highlight the incommensurability of that which is repeated but also different from its previous iterations. Yet the fugue, though Soja invokes it as a mode which resists closure, is in fact a highly organized musical form, one made particularly famous by composers (like Bach, for example) who worked within a system of rigid musical rules.

It may thus seem a particular stretch to suggest, by way of a concluding chapter, that there is a political dimension shared by both Lefebvre's *Production of Space* and work by Blake. Granted, both authors struggle against the systematization of their own work, while at the same time mounting a critique of systematicity in that work itself. Yet there is again the crucial difference to note. Blake's work invokes textual and material instabilities as part of its critique. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, however, is a much more "traditional" text, at least as far as its textual and material presentation are concerned. Lefebvre's *book* participates in all the kinds of orderly bookishness I have explored in previous chapters: it is bound in a front and back cover and typeset (in 12 point Sabon); it is divided into titled chapters; pages are numbered consecutively; it has

an index and contents page; and it has an "Afterword" by David Harvey which functions in part to situate *The Production of Space* in relation to Lefebvre's life and other work–the "Afterword" ends with a chronological list of (all hyper-orderly mechanisms) of books by Lefebvre. Further, it circulates as a mass produced text with likely little, if any, variation among the many that have been produced. Soja's metaphor of the fugue is thus revealing, since it at once tries to identify and represent the anti-system impulse in Lefebvre's work, but at the same time cannot help but reveal the degree to which that work still participates in various kinds of orderly systems (not least being its conventional book form).

What Blake's marginalia can show is the degree to which texts are open to revision and recontextualization by other writers, and the degree to which the act of annotation can participate in resistance to finality and closure. Soja's *Thirdspace*, which tries to explicate much of what goes on in Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, and which I return to frequently, operates as a kind of marginal gloss on Lefebvre, though it does not occupy the literal margins of Lefebvre's book. It does, however, provoke a certain kind of reading of Lefebvre's work, one which tries to highlight the resistance in Lefebvre's text to ideas being read as though they were in final form.

So while I want to suggest some intersections between the anti-system critiques mounted by Blake and by Lefebvre, I do so with the caveat that Blake's critique operates in a much more textually intense way, for it emerges not just from the "content" of Blake's work, but from the very materiality of that work itself. Reading instabilities in Lefebvre is to suggest the way in which, in a postmodern context, an anti-system

argument can be mounted despite Lefebvre not having access to the same possibilities for radical textual disruption that Blake did (because Lefebvre was not the same kind of artist as Blake was).

<div align="center">Disorder</div>

In order to suggest the ways in which Lefebvre's work and Blake's work can speak to each other, and again to broaden the scope of my intervention to suggest more varied cultural possibilities, I introduce ideas of disorder, energy, and entropy as they derive specifically from the fields of information and thermodynamic theory (or "chaos theory" in general terms). At stake is roughly this: disorder, in its common usages, generally carries a negative valence. (N. Katherine Hayles writes that in the predominating binary logic of the West, "if order is good, chaos is bad"(Chaos and Order 3).) But as a technical term from information theory, disorder denotes a condition of possibility, and from thermodynamic theory, a condition of potential energy. How do these senses of disorder (and its correlate, entropy) play out as ways of negotiating work by Blake and by Lefebvre, in particular the politically charged anti-system aspect of their work?

There are a number of diverse ideas and texts in motion here: some by Blake; Lefebvre's Production of Space; Soja's Thirdspace; and the instrumental metaphors of disorder, entropy, and energy. The purpose is in large part to engage in an analysis that forces a variety of texts/ideas to gloss one another, to move fluidly from the margin to the centre to the margin and back again. To put it in more conventional terms, the whole is to be more than just the sum of the parts.

As has been the case in the chapters up to this point, my focus will remain more on formal issues and less on content analysis or explication. The distinction between form and content is not a perfect one of course, and perhaps confuses more than it clarifies. But my approach admittedly avoids certain kinds of critical gestures. By "formal" analysis, I mean to focus on something like the "fugal" structure, as Edward Soja calls it, in Lefebvre's work, whereby particular ideas are circulated and re-circulated in the fugal mode of theme and variation (this represents an aspect of what I am calling disorder in Lefebvre's work and is a product of his insistence that his own work not become systematized or dogmatic; though again the fugue metaphor that Soja deploys is an ambivalent one, for the fugue, while it does allow for repetition and development, is itself a highly organized compositional structure). My attention though is on flows and movements and formal arrangements within Lefebvre's work. I will not attempt to assimilate Lefebvre's "ideas" with the substantial tradition(s) within which he is working (including, but not limited to, Marxism, structuralism, poststructuralism, philosophy, linguistics, history). Soja's reading of Lefebvre draws out and distills many of the key arguments in Lefebvre's work. Though by reading Soja, who is writing on Lefebvre's work, in the explicit terms of Soja "glossing" Lefebvre, I hope to highlight the way in which glossing, even when it does not take the literal form of commentary in the margins, can work against stability and closure. Soja's *Thirdspace* is thus admittedly an argumentative convenience for me, but more importantly it functions as an example of "annotating" a work beyond making literal additions to a "host" text.

To develop the idea of disorder as a technical term, I look to work by writers like Claude Shannon and A. B. Çambel, and primarily to N. Katherine Hayles. Hayles' *Chaos Bound* not only illuminates important terms like disorder and entropy (as both scientifically and culturally informative), but also shows how interdisciplinary studies of "science" and "literature," so-called, can yield profoundly insightful results by virtue of exposing such categories as mere rubrics under which knowledge tends to be organized in very similar ways, and which are informed by similar instrumental metaphors ("disorder" for example) which make it possible to link otherwise seemingly disparate things: like the work of Lefebvre and Blake.

N. Katherine Hayles describes this linking:

> Suppose an island breaks through the surface of the water, then another and another, until the sea is dotted with islands. Each has its own ecology, terrain, and morphology. One can recognize these distinctions and at the same time wonder whether they are all part of an emerging mountain range, connected both through substrata they share and through larger forces that brought them into being. (*Chaos Bound* 3)

Informational and thermodynamic theories of entropy provide ways whereby the disordered spaces in communication and in dynamic models can be read for a certain *positive* energy. Disorder does not describe a state of randomness, but rather a condition in which energy remains to alter the model or system, often into a more complex state. Hayles remarks that "An important turning point in the science of chaos occurred when complex systems were conceptualized as systems rich in information rather than poor in order" (*Chaos and Order* 6). The general parallel then between cultural studies, for

example, and chaos theory, can be drawn in terms of the order and uniformity of state apparatuses or capitalist production models (as subjects for cultural analysis) and their tendency towards maximum entropy (a condition of no potential energy for change, usually coded in terms of maximum "efficiency"), and the contrasting energy required for critique which must come from disordering otherwise ordered sites. If there is positive energy in chaotic systems, disorderly but potentially productive, then the disorder of critical deconstruction need not be seen as the aftermath of destruction, but rather as a state of potential energy (perhaps even a necessary state) from which new critique (or spaces of analysis) might arise. Further, and more specifically, reading the annotated page "through" (or itself glossed by) the instrumental metaphor of disorder as a positive condition, helps to show how the instability, or even the "disorganization" that results from annotation can function positively. Valuing disorder positively rather than negatively allows us to see the annotated page, a site of conceptual and textual instability, in terms of the positive energy it embodies.

Entropy: Some Definitions

There are two forces in the world, entropy and energy. One leads into blessed quietude, to happy equilibrium, the other to the destruction of equilibrium . . .
- We, *Evgenii Zamyatin* (153-154)

Zamyatin's 1924 dystopic vision *We* imagines a world in which the state, specifically the "United State," has crushed all critical voices that could ever rise against it by imposing its rationality: the rightness of rule under the "Well-Doer." The main character, identified by his number, D-503, finds himself torn between the iron, yet

satisfying rationality he's known all his life, the rationality of "equations in everything," and his love for a woman he meets whose facial features form "a strange irritating X" (5,8). It is through her that D-503 begins to sense something more to life than slavish adherence to the United State. It is the unsolvable X, the unknown, which suggests to D-503 something beyond the equations (the explanations, the predictable link between cause and effect) upon which he so depends. Zamyatin elsewhere formulates this crisis in more general terms: "The habitual, the banal is of course simpler, pleasanter, more comfortable," whereas "A new form is not intelligible to all; for many it is difficult" ("On Literature, Revolution and Entropy," quoted in *Russian Themes*, 292). Zamyatin's formulation of entropy and energy as cultural concepts is extremely useful, for it situates them at the crux of a broad politics of power and the possibility (or impossibility) for meaningful human agency.

The concept of entropy itself is slippery, having numerous definitions and thus applications. As Hayles points out, "[entropy] has undergone so many changes in meaning that it actually encompasses several concepts" (*Chaos Bound* 38). This is partly why it is so useful a concept to relate otherwise localized contexts; even in the sciences, it speaks across a number of disciplinary lines. Louis de Broglie, a physicist who received the Nobel prize for showing how *particles* can behave like *waves*, said, "Nothing is more misleading than a clear and distinct idea" (quoted in Çambel 128). The clear and distinct idea represents a fixed condition, an immobility, within a body of knowledge whereby the potential for self-reflexivity, change, growth, or reconsideration is suppressed. Michel Foucault envisioned "the moment of new mobility and new displacement," in response to

an assertion by Bernard-Henri Lévy that at certain points within the critical process would come "the time to stop, the moment of reflection and regaining equilibrium" (120). What seems to characterize many critical projects (in both broad and specific terms) is what Peter Hitchcock has called "restless inquiry" in *Oscillate Wildly* (3). Notably, de Broglie, Hitchcock, and Foucault, thinkers from diverse fields, are expressing a conceptually similar theme in their concern for mobility versus immobility.

As A. B. Çambel points out in *Applied Chaos Theory*, there are many "entropies;" definitions include "the ability to reach equilibrium," "a measure of chaos," or "an indication of transmitting information" (130-131). N. Katherine Hayles calls entropy a "statistical measure of disorder," yet "so rich in significance is the statistical view of entropy that its full implications are still being explored" (*Chaos Bound* 42). Webster's *New Compact Dictionary* gives us something slightly different: "entropy: . . . measure of the unavailable energy of a system: an ultimate state of inert uniformity" (135).

Entropy in thermodynamic systems measures, in one sense, the disorder of bodies in a system. Molecules (bodies) in a cup of tea are considered disordered if you have just poured milk in. There are pockets of "hot" and "cold" molecules; that is, molecules with more or less energy. But the cup will tend towards uniformity (a process aided by your stirring) in which energy passes from areas of hot to areas of cold; entropy increases. Finally, the cup of tea reaches, more or less, a state of uniform heat distribution, at which point entropy is high, since the disorderly molecules have become ordered. In terms of disorder and entropy, the measure is inverse.

Heat death, a concept deeply tied to entropy, is when the universe (or a working model) has run out of energy, in that its particles (molecules, for example) have reached a state of completely uniform distribution. There are no differences which can generate energy (or generate energy *transfer* since, technically, energy is never *created*). True or total "heat death" does not really happen in the tea cup because it is not a perfectly closed system. The tea is in contact with the cup which is in contact with your hand, the air, etc. But for the purposes of the model, heat death is that point at which the system has reached thermodynamic uniformity, and there is no energy available unless it comes from "outside" the system (you add more hot water or cold milk or you spill the whole cup in your lap, in which case there is a sudden burst of energy). The broad parallel I want to install is between the metaphor of heat death, which describes the condition of no energy, and the completely stabilized page (both the page as textual site and "the page" as representative of the conceptual ideas printed thereon) as one in which no energy remains for change or difference.

Disorder in information theory is slightly different since it is a measure, not of bodies, but of immaterial potential. In information theory, entropy measures the number of *possible forms* a message can take. In his "Mathematical Theory of Communication," Claude Shannon proposed this formula: $E=f(S,N)$. That is, signal (E) is a function of the transmitted signal (S) and noise (N). Shannon writes, "noise is considered to be a chance variable" which can be treated by a suitable stochastic process (34). Noise, for Shannon, represents breakdown, or malfunction in the communication system since (E) will no longer correspond exactly to (S): "the received signal is not necessarily the same as that

sent out by the transmitter" (34). That noise is treated negatively by Shannon (i.e. a problem to be overcome) is perhaps not surprising, given that he was working out of Bell Telephone Laboratories at the time, trying to find a way to theorize communication and mathematics together such that what seemed the uncontrollable interference of noise in communication systems could be calculated and thereby predicted and controlled.

In Shannon's formulation, the orderly signal is that which is received exactly as it is transmitted. Importantly, the media of transmission disappears entirely, and the myth of textual transparency is once again invoked. Perfect communication, however, is an ideal (for Shannon at least); but transmitting media *do* affect transmissions, a condition that Blake confronts through the persistent textual instability of his work. There is no access to meaning in Blake's work that is not mediated by textuality. Without the textual instabilities that Blake was able to integrate into his work (or that emerge from his work whether he consciously integrated them or not), Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* is itself prone to allowing readers the false sense of arriving at meaning without negotiating the textual or material aspects that make the book possible. That is, even the disorderly ("fugal") presentation of often semi-contradictory ideas, occurs in Lefebvre on the conceptual level, not the textual level. My reading of Soja and Lefebvre, as the former annotating the latter, in conjunction with the literal practice of annotating by Blake (though in an entirely different context), is in part to salvage Lefebvre's anti-system critique from the otherwise overly stable textual system of his own book. Soja's *Thirdspace*, as gloss on Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, works in part to destabilize Lefebvre's text (even as it celebrates it) by highlighting certain sections while ignoring

others, by extracting otherwise disparate moments and presenting them in closer proximity through quotation, and by suggesting moments in *The Production of Space* that resonate with moments in other of Lefebvre's works. The fugal structure internal to Lefebvre's work might have provided "some" protection against the systematization of the text itself, but Soja's own *Thirdspace* in fact provides much more, by operating on Lefebvre's text from the outside. It cannot disrupt Lefebvre's work on the textual level (although I'm sure Soja's copy of *The Production of Space* is full of marginal annotations), but it certainly works to disrupt *The Production of Space* on the conceptual level. It is important to see this disruption, this non-textual disordering of Lefebvre's work, as a positive force–a condition, as suggested by information and thermodynamic theory, in which disorder connotes energy and potential.

Disorder, the result of noise, creates potential and possibility in terms of what signal might be received. Entropy is highest when E corresponds exactly to S. However, entropy decreases as (N) increases in the formulation E=f(S,N). It is important to note, then, that entropy in communication systems is an inverse measure of potential or possibility. For Shannon this posed a problem, since the message somebody sent suffered the possibility of change along the way. Low entropy suggests a high number of potential messages that might be received based on the originally transmitted signal. As Shannon notes, "If the channel is noisy it is not in general possible to reconstruct the original message . . . with *certainty* by any operation on the received signal" (35). And he continues, "There are, however, ways of transmitting the information which are optimal in combat[t]ling noise" (35).

At its most basic, reading the space of Blake's page through the concept of entropy depends upon the fundamental assumption which underlies Shannon's formula: noise (that is, the "channel," the media of transmission) can function to change a transmitted signal. Yet it is important to note that where Shannon reads noise as a stochastic phenomenon, the noise of artistic disorder, as I am reading it here, is not random. That is, it is not meaningless. Rather, it is better defined as chaotic, in the true sense that chaotic systems are not entirely predictable (and thus are often confused with random systems) but that causes initiated in a chaotic system do have effects predictable within a certain range. The relationship between cause and effect need not be linear, since small causes can have big effects. Thus the potential for creating new spaces (or art or analyses), by retaining a certain degree of disorder or openness, is made that much more significant by the possibility that those spaces will be truly revolutionary in creating change beyond the local contexts in which they occur.

The fixed and finished page might represent the situation where disorder is low, entropy is high, but as such, the possibility for difference (for something new) is also low, perhaps even nonexistent. Certainly Blake himself would not have put it in these terms, but in many ways the instabilities that often make reading his work so difficult function to keep a level of disorder operating on the page, and thus retain the conditions under which new possibilities can develop. The page as a space of potential (a space open to differences, to multiple readings, to re-readings) functioned as a crucial part of Blake's opposition to the forces of abstraction and presumed universality which make tyranny possible. Where the possibility for dialogue or multivocality is repressed is where the

marginal will be made powerless. As Blake's marginalia show, however, the margins are not ineffectual. They are a space of radical potential. Blake's introduction of marginalia functions to open up play within the page. The message which had been previously "complete," is opened to new possibilities. The ideas of one author, which had been linked in one way, are often unlinked and then re-linked in different ways by Blake's hand. And the materiality of the "channels" of communication is shown, sometimes dramatically, to affect how meaning is produced (even to constitute meaning in and of itself).

A book like *The Book of Urizen* is perpetually open because of its textual, and in some cases material, instabilities. Despite Urizen's insistent attempts to control his own books (in *The Book of Urizen* and elsewhere), the book's own indeterminacy functions to undermine pretensions to stability and control. Blake's marginalia force new possibilities in the texts he's annotating, and reveal the formal, textual, and material devices of control at work in the type-set book; the marginalia participate as deeply in Blake's anti-systemic project as do any of his more "central" works.

Postmodern

The kinds of explicit and implicit political critiques in Blake's work, initiated as part of his anti-Newtonianism, persist in many postmodern theoretical works. Though it persists not necessarily as part of a critique of Newtonianism per se, but rather as part of a more general critique of systematicity and its relation to such issues as globalization, cultural hegemony, social tyranny, and postindustrialization.

Soja writes that Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* operates

> unlike a conventional academic text with arguments developed in a
> neat linear sequence from beginning to middle to end . . . perhaps
> Lefebvre was presenting *The Production of Space* as a musical
> composition . . . a polyphonic fugue that assertively introduced its
> keynote themes early on and then changed them intentionally in
> contrapuntal variations that took radically different forms and
> harmonies. (Soja 8-9)

In his Preface to Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, Michel Trebitsch describes

Lefebvre's style: "between flexibility and vagueness, where thinking is like strolling,

where thinking is *rhapsodic* [his italics], as opposed to more permanent constructions,

with their monolithic, reinforced, reassuring arguments, painstakingly built upon

structures and models" (ix). And Lefebvre himself, in the Foreword to the second edition

of *Critique of Everyday Life* notes his opposition to the idea that "Marxism is a

completed system and that philosophy's role and function are at an end." "Such

arguments," writes Lefebvre, "must be deemed dogmatic and false." (4-5).)

Lefebvre himself is quite clear to avoid a "THE END," even given the practical

constraints of book form. He complicates his conclusions by titling his last chapter

"Openings and Conclusions." Lefebvre opens his final conclusion: "we are concerned

with nothing that even remotely resembles a system" (423, my italics). And so Lefebvre,

in his study of spaces, is careful to leave the project open beyond the end of the material

book, such that new spaces of study might develop. The disorder of the fugal form (that

is, its resistance to ideas presented in argumentative forms which depend on empirical

proof and freedom from internal contradiction) provides the energy by which Lefebvre's

work opposes the tendency towards closure, and entropic heat death, that always seems a

dangerous possibility. Soja comments on Lefebvre's text: "Lefebvre modifies his descriptions as he moves along, and in subsequent chapters seems either to ignore his earlier formulations or to push them to their limits, ever ready to move on to something else" (65-66). "What can we learn beyond this?" is the question latent in each of Lefebvre's approximations, energized by the disorder in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre himself employs the idea of entropy as a cultural metaphor:

> The state is consolidating on a world scale. It weighs down on society (on all societies) in full force; it plans and organizes society 'rationally', with the help of knowledge and technology, imposing analogous, if not homologous, measures irrespective of political ideology, historical background, or the class origins of those in power. The state crushes time by reducing differences to repetitions or circularities (dubbed 'equilibrium', 'feedback', 'self-regulation', and so on) . . . This modern state promotes and imposes itself as a stable centre–definitively–of (national) societies and spaces. As both the end and the meaning of history–just as Hegel had forecast–it flattens the social and 'cultural' spheres. It enforces a logic that puts an end to conflicts and contradictions. It neutralizes whatever resists it by castration or crushing. Is this social entropy? Whatever the answer, the results lie before us. (23)

Interestingly, Lefebvre edges toward the universalizing he so dislikes in his treatment of *the* State, not *a* State, as though they were all homologous. Lefebvre might avoid particularities in this case, in order to maintain theoretical breadth. However, other writers favour the parochial. For example, Meaghan Morris, in *Too Soon, Too Late*, writes, "I have been less interested in the morphology of . . . places ('the' motel, 'the' mall) . . . than in those individuating intensities ('this' motel, 'this' mall)" (124). However, the broad generalizing Lefebvre practices here–itself a kind of systematic flattening–is countered in his text by the fugal structure Edward Soja notes. The return of certain

refrains with slight variation helps to keep an openness, or a "qualified-ness," to many of Lefebvre's otherwise closed assertions. Thus, he is quite difficult to "quote," since each of the text's parts is conditioned and qualified by other parts. Turning to Soja writing about (or glossing) Lefebvre provides the opportunity to consider how Lefebvre's work can be kept open, despite the material ending of *The Production of Space* itself, and thus how a system-resistant project can work (again, a project that is conceptually akin to Blake's but that does not take the textually disruptive form that Blake's does).

Notably, both Blake and Lefebvre can appear deceptively *easy* to quote, in that each provides (almost playfully it seems) statements which appear comprehensive and irreducible; however, consider the example of Blake writing what seems the definitively quotable platitude: "To generalize is to be an idiot!" (641; quoted, ironically, from the annotations to Reynolds' *Discourses*). This is itself, of course, a generalization.

Variation (sometimes even contradiction) in the face of what seem irreducible statements pervades *The Production of Space*. For example, at one point Lefebvre associates capitalism with chaos, while he elsewhere aligns capitalism with the State–a powerfully unchaotic force–especially as capitalism and national, or State, identity, are so intertwined. He writes, "might not the spatial chaos engendered by capitalism . . . turn out to be the system's Achilles' heel?" (63). One statement regarding State stability is qualified (perhaps "glossed") by a later statement on capitalist instability, and each of these problematized as Lefebvre links capitalism and the State.

Lefebvre works profoundly against the logic that puts an end to conflicts and contradictions. In fact, he introduces contradictions and slippages. As Soja notes, "*The*

Production of Space is a bewildering book, filled with unruly textual practices, bold

assertions that seem to get tossed aside as the arguments develop, and perplexing

inconsistencies and apparent self-contradictions" (8). Soja calls Lefebvre's logic a

"both/and also" logic which works against the binary logic of either/or choices and the

closures they imply (3). Lefebvre's "radically open perspective" (as Soja calls it)

produces disorder from unresolved conflicts and contradictions (5).

Tripartite structures, for example, are key to the proliferating perspectives

Lefebvre opens up. Soja describes Lefebvre's penchant for thinking in threes as

"trialectical thinking," and writes that it is "disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving,

unfixed, never presentable in permanent constructions" (Soja 70). On page 33 of *The

Production of Space*, Lefebvre introduces spatial practice, representations of space and

representational spaces as three parts in a "conceptual triad [a trialectic] . . . to which we

will be returning over and over again" (33). The triad returns on page 38, though it is

complicated by a second triad: perceived, conceived and lived spaces. Spatial practice is

that space of the perceived, representations of space are those of the conceived, and

representational spaces are those of the lived. Each part of each triad is distinct from, yet

involved with, each other part. *The Production of Space* is, in many ways, a continuous

reworking of these triads whereby definitions change with new contexts. In this way,

Lefebvre can begin to construct his science of space without arriving at reductive

generalizations, which for him signal the conceptual uniformity beyond which critique is

no longer possible and from which nothing else can be learned. In his final paragraph,

Lefebvre recalls the recurring tripartite series of perceived, conceived and lived spaces,

though here they describe the kind of orientation Lefebvre is looking for, not the spaces he's exploring. The perceived-conceived-lived triad appears in modified form, neither completely like nor completely different from its earlier uses, inviting the reader, even as the author concludes, to assimilate this variation on the theme, and thereby complicating what might have otherwise seemed to have become stable terms. The very use of the tri-partite structures, in which any combination of two is always complicated by another term, suggests Lefebvre's concern with the easy simplicity with which binary opposites can be used to order and classify, and which gird the dominant logic Lefebvre is trying to work against.

As Soja puts it, "there is always an-Other term" as part of Lefebvre's "insistent disordering" (7). Disordering, thinking in threes, contradiction, theme and variation: these all mark ways in which Lefebvre is able to instantiate, every time a reader confronts *The Production of Space*, the very critique he is trying to mount against the modern state's efforts to impose itself as a stable centre, to flatten the social and cultural spheres, to neutralize whatever resists it by castration and crushing, to reduce differences to repetitions and circularities, and to achieve social entropy with itself as the final systematic form.

Openings and Conclusions

The task of commentary can never, by definition, be completed.
- Foucault (*The Order of Things* 41)

It seems fitting to close the final chapter with a quotation I had included in the Preface, not to provide a sense of closed circularity, but to remind rather that the spectre

of incompletability has haunted the present work from beginning to end. There is no
shortage of things that are left incomplete here, and still more that have been omitted
entirely. Sometimes, incompleteness has been a result of too little room and time to
pursue every suggestion to its fullest. But more often, it has resulted from the insistent
urge to move towards a "something else" that has always seemed to be just within reach,
suggested by but not fully articulated by what had come before.

Certainly the marginalia are an undiscovered country in the field of Blake studies,
and there remain numerous areas for further research. I have not even attempted an
extended explication of the marginalia, since it has been my purpose to explore a very
different dimension of them: not so much *what* they mean, but *how* they mean, especially
in the context of often very complicated forces at work throughout Blake's art. Often I
have been trying to describe that which can only be sensed as one actively participates in
reading, and when one confronts the pages of Blake's work in their full visual and verbal
dimensions. (Nelson Hilton writes of "the particular naked intensity we often sense
rather than grasp in Blake" (1).) If there is the sense of circling around possibilities here,
it stems from that longing ache to "argue" the phenomenology of myself as reader,
instantiating, every time I read, new pressures on what I thought I understood about
writing, language, printing, reading, meaning, and authority.

There is at least one basic question worth addressing directly as part of my
conclusion: why Blake?

Stuart Peterfreund writes that

> Many of the eighteenth-century writers active before the
> 1790s, when Blake came to intellectual and artistic
> maturity, recognized the rhetorical and ontological status of
> Newtonian argument *as argument*, and they evinced a
> shared concern about the full significance of that argument
> and the limits to which it might be made, by analogy, to
> serve in other fields of inquiry . . . Addison, Pope,
> Desaguliers, Johnson, and others may have disagreed over
> the extent to which Newtonian physics could, by argument
> from analogy, be used to help see the "subjective" aspects
> of the Universe in an orderly manner. But these and other
> writers of the eighteenth century were of one mind
> concerning the "objective" truth of Newtonian physics *per
> se*. (21)

What sets Blake apart from the general sense of unease some writers felt with the

spread of Newtonianism, is that Blake went so far as to challenge the assumed objectivity

of Newtonian physics, and in doing so (or in order to do so) Blake created an art that

forced and allowed a different temporal and spatial experience of reading. There could be

contradiction. There could be just a sense of things. There could be openness, fluidity,

and changeability. There could also be compassion in the face of difference. There could

be a way of being in the world that was neither deterministic and rule-bound nor chaotic,

disorganized, abysmal, and nihilistic.

In this sense, I think Blake comes close to making possible change to the human

condition on that most basic level that Lefebvre identifies as lived experience. And it is

in this lived experienced, these "spaces of representation" that Lefebvre located the

possibility for counterspaces, or what Soja describes as "spaces of resistance to the

dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized

positioning" (68). Of course the present study has been not just of Blake's vision itself as marginal in relation to the dominant culture, but of the literally "marginal" within Blake's work. These metaphoric and literal marginalizations make what might be learned *from the margins* (as one could inhabit the margin and study it) that much more crucial, since it is that which might otherwise go totally unnoticed.

Blake's challenge was one that presented not only the "mental fight" he calls for in *Milton* (Plate I: 13), but it took the material form of a new kind of page, a new approach to the material book, and a deeply self-reflexive theorization of what it meant to make and to read a book, a text, and meaning.

In this final chapter, I have tried to identify a critique against systems, a critique like Blake's, but one that does not operate through textual or material disruption in the way that Blake's does. In order to suggest how the idea of marginalizing can still function, though in the conceptual, not the textual sense, I have introduced multiple texts and ideas, each glossing the other. I have not introduced Lefebvre as one "central" text, against which to juxtapose Blake as another "central" text. Rather, Blake's work conditions how I read Lefebvre, and how I position Soja writing on (as glossing) Lefebvre. Thermodynamic and information theory provides metaphors which gloss both Blake's work and Lefebvre's. And reading each author's work as glossed in this way suggests further possibilities for how such instrumental metaphors can be used to access and to re-evaluate other literary and critical projects. And *The Production of Space* itself works to condition my reading (and re-reading) of Blake's work, in terms of how important change can be when it occurs on the level of the lived experience.

Lefebvre's conclusion is worth quoting again at length:

> On the horizon, then, at the furthest edge of the possible, it is
> a matter of producing the space of the human species–the
> collective (generic) work of the species–on the model of what
> used to be called 'art': indeed, it is still so called, but art no
> longer has any meaning at the level of an 'object' isolated for and
> by the individual.
>
> The creation (or production) of a planet-wide space as the
> social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad
> possibilities–such is the dawn now beginning to break far on the
> horizon . . . I speak of an *orientation* advisedly. We are concerned with
> nothing more or less than that. We are concerned with what might
> be called a 'sense': an organ that perceives, a direction that may be
> conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the
> horizon. And we are concerned with nothing that even remotely
> resembles a system. (422-423)

Tearing the book reveals the page as a site for contesting the forces that make

oppression possible, for imagining towards, but never arriving at, a horizon. An

appropriate way to close here is perhaps just to say that there is considerable work left to

be done.

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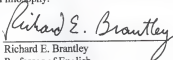
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Before attending the University of Florida, Jason Snart attended the University of Alberta, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees in English. He has published in the fields of Blake studies and Romanticism, in addition to fields like classroom and teaching pedagogy. He is currently working on publishing a photographic facsimile edition of William Blake's marginalia. He will also be a part of the project to incorporate Blake's marginalia into the online William Blake Archive.

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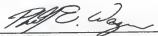
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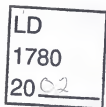
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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